Perplexed by blockthewriter

Category: Stranger Things, 2016
Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi
Language: English
Characters: Mike W., OC, Will B.
Status: Completed
Published: 2018-02-13 20:39:08
Updated: 2018-10-24 20:20:37
Packaged: 2019-12-12 22:57:14
Rating: T
Chapters: 17
Words: 56,196
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: When it seemed that the Party had just managed to recover from the events of the previous year, at least for the most part, trouble begins to resurface again in their small town of Hawkins. Ross King finds herself stuck with the new boy, while problems with the new girl threaten to shift the balance in their small circle. Set in Season 2 of ST, crossover with IT(2017).

1. Chapter 1

"*Lucas? Ross, you copy? I've got four quarters. What's your haul?"*

Ross clenched her teeth, and snatched up her walkie talkie, pressing a button on the side. "Two on my side. Dad went though my jar again," she said, glaring at the now empty jar labeled **Change** on her dresser. She thumbed the two quarters in her pocket, and stood up.

"*Take your puny hauls and multiply it by five,"* Lucas's voice came through the walkie talkie. Ross glanced at it in surprise before continuing towards her closet.

"*How?"* Dustin asked, and Ross silently wondered the same thing. For being eighth graders, money was scarce, especially quarters. Had Lucas done a chore for someone? Or did he just have that much change lying around?

"*While you two were scrounging around like homeless bums, I mowed Old Man Humphrey's lawn,"* Lucas said, pride lacing through his voice. Ross huffed. Of course he mowed someone's lawn. If she didn't live in the middle of the woods, maybe she could be raking in that kinda money, too.

"*Old Man Humphrey's got that kinda cash?"* Dustin speculated. Ross pressed the button, deciding to add her input.

"Hey, we aren't complaining. Lucas next time you should mow that lawn for me."

"*Ha, ha, Ross,"* Lucas bit back. "*Just call Mike already."*

"*You call Mike,"* Dustin replied.

"*I have to go take a shower from doing real work, like a man,"* Lucas argued, taunting Dustin. Ross stifled a laugh. It was an ongoing occurence, the boys trying to make points and argue how much of a man they were. She found it comical, because their evidence were measly things, like mowing a lawn, for instance. "*Over and out."*

A groan came in from the static, and Dustin said," *Ross, call Mike."*

She made a sour face. Why did he insist on not doing it? She had no problem with calling Mike, but Dustin demanding her to do it made her not want to do it even more. "Why can't you do it?"

"*Just call him, please,"* he said.

"No way. Anyway, I've still gotta change. It's getting colder and I need to find a long sleeve shirt," she argued. "You call him, please and thank you. Over and out."

Ross clicked off her walkie talkie and set it on her dresser. Then, she swung open her closet door, eyes scanning the shirts on their hangers. She was looking for her favorite long sleeved shirt, a plain teal, thin, turtlenecked shirt. Pushing over some shirts she found it, and pulled it off.

She'd gotten the shirt from Joyce a few years back for christmas, when Will's mom had bought all his friends something. Ross shrugged off the t-shirt she was wearing and snatched up the teal one, slipping her arms in.

From somewhere in the house, Ross heard a knocking at the door, and her dad shouted, telling her that one of her friends were here. Quickly she pulled the shirt over her head and onto her body, then grabbed her jacket from the bed and shrugged it on. "Coming!"

She picked up her shoes from the floor and ran from her room. Her dad stood at the open door, where Will stood in the frame.

"Hi, Ross," Will said, smiling lightly. She smiled back, grabbing her snow hat from the table, and shoving it on her head.

"Put on your shoes, Ross," her dad said. She glanced up at him as she passed, nodding slightly.

"I will when I get in the car. Bye dad," she said, grabbing Will's elbow and pulling him down the steps of the porch with her. It was cold, and Joyce waited in the car on the drive.

"Tell your mother I said hi, Will!" Ross's dad called after them. They reached the car, and Will got into the passengers seat while Ross climbed in the back.

"Hi, Ross," Joyce greeted happily, smiling back on the redhead.

"Hello, Ms.B," Ross said, smiling at her as she pulled on her shoes. They were black converse, and she placed her foot on the seat next to her so she could lace them up. "How're you?"

"I'm great." Joyce replied.

"Ross's dad says hi, mom," Will said from the front seat. Joyce glanced to the man who was still standing in the doorway, and waved slightly.

Ross sighed quietly," I'm sorry about him, Ms. B."

"No, you're completely fine," Joyce assured her, pulling out of the drive. The woman faced forward, glancing at Ross through the rear view mirror.

It was no secret that Ross's dad harbored a crush on Joyce. He'd had it sweet on her since high school, which caused complication within Ross's parent's marriage.

"You ready to get beat on Pac Man?" Will asked playfully from the front, breaking the silence. Ross snorted, rolling her eyes.

"In your dreams."

Ross smiled as they pulled up to the Palace Arcade, spotting Dustin, Mike, and Lucas placing their bike in the racks. Joyce honked twice, grabbing their attention.

"Hey!" Lucas called, waving.

"Okay, so I'll pick you both up in two hours," Joyce told them, placing a hand on Will's shoulder. "That's 9 o'clock on the dot, okay?"

"Will do, Ms. B," Ross chimed.

"Okay," Will nodded, eager to exit the car.

"And if anything happens, and you need to come home, just ask them

to use their phone and call home, okay?" Joyce continued. "And don't-"

"Don't walk or bike home, I know," Will reassured her. "I know."

"Okay, but sweetie-"

"Mom, I have to go," Will stressed, opening the car door.

"-have fun," Joyce finished, smiling at her son. Will got out, pushing up the front seat so Ross could climb out behind him.

They both raced for the doors, excited for the next two hours.

Inside, the five of them crowded around Dragon's Lair, listening as the princess told Dustin how to slay the dragon.

"Oh, Jesus," Dustin said. "I'm in uncharted territory here, guys."

"Down! Down, down," the rest of them chorused, watching the screen.

"I'm going! I'm going!" Dustin exclaimed, pushing down on the joystick.

Their prodding became muddled together as they all stressed for him to do something different, desperate for him to win.

"I'm going, I'm going, I'm going!"

"The sword!" Ross pressed, bumping agaisnt Mike as she tried to look over Dustin's shoulder. "Get it!"

"Okay!" Dustin exclaimed at all of them. "Shut up, shut up, shut up!"

The boys cried out as the knight was engulfed in the dragon's flames, and Dustin gasped. He put a fist to his mouth and said," No. No. No!" His knight crumbled into a pile of bones.

"No, no, no!" Dustin exclaimed. He hit the machine," I hate this overpriced bullshit! Son of bitch! Peice a shit."

Lucas leaned against the game, smirking. "You're not nimble enough.

But you'll get there one day." He pointed, leaning forward. "But until then, Princess Daphne is still mine."

"You know what, whatever," Dustin said, shaking his head. "I'm still tops on Centipede and Dig Dug." Ross laughed, moving some hair out of her face.

Behind them, someone asked," You sure about that?" They all turned to see Keith, a teenager just about Nancy and Jonathan's age. He stood with his usual bag of cheese puffs, smiling at the group.

"Sure about what?" Dustin asked, eyes wide.

Keith said nothing, and instead bit down on another puff. Dustin pushed past Will and Mike and rushed to the next isle of games, telling people to move from his way.

"No! No!" he shouted, grabbing at the machine and staring with dread at the screen. Unlike usual, it was not Dustin's name that held the top rank.

"Mad Max?" Ross muttered.

"751,300 points!" Will exclaimed.

"That's impossible," Mike said, peering at the screen.

Dustin stood straight and turned to Keith, glaring hard. "Who is Mad Max?"

Ross turned, too, just to see that the boy was directly behind her. She stepped back, trying to keep a look of disgust from her face. She bumped into Mike, who glanced at her and pulled her from in front of him to beside him.

"Better than you," Keith remarked smartly, orange crumbs falling from his mouth. Ross furrowed her eyebrows.

"Okay, smartass," she said, rolling her eyes. Dustin flipped him off, moving aside as Will pointed at Keith.

"It is you?" Will asked.

Keith squinted his eyes. "You know I despise Dig Dug." Ross inwardly thought that he wasn't very good at any games anyway, but kept it to herself. He shoved another cheese puff into his mouth.

"Then who is it?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah, spill it, *Keith,"* Dustin spat.

"You want information, then I need something in return," Keith said, spitting a bit as he spoke. Ross groaned, immediately knowing where this was headed. He turned to Mike, pulling the corners of his mouth up in a creepy, tight smile. The boys turned to Mike as well, and he shook his head.

"No, no, no," Mike said, looking back at Keith. "No way. You're not getting a date with her."

"Mike, come on," Lucas pleaded. "Just get him the date."

Mike swivled to look at Lucas, a look of disbelief on his face. "I'm not prostituting my sister!"

Ross frowned, speaking up," One, not sure that's exactly what prostitution is." She looked at Keith, gesturing to him as whole, finally allowing her disgust to show. "And two, Nancy's got a boyfriend anyway. I mean I really doubt she'd go out with you before, but now?" Keith glared at her.

"It's for a good cause!" Lucas exclaimed, waving his hands.

"No, don't get him the date," Dustin spoke up, stepping forward. "Know why? He's gonna spread his nasty ass rash to your whole family!"

"Acne isn't a rash, and it isn't contagious, you prepubescent wastoid," Keith hissed defensively.

"Oh, I'm a wastoid?" Dustin asked. "She wouldn't go on a date with you anyway. You make like what, 2.50 an hour?"

"Nice perm," Keith taunted, shoving a cheese puff into his mouth.

"Gonna make fun of my hair?" Dustin asked. Ross rolled her eyes at the boys. As amusing as it was, she knew it would now just turn into another arguement over pointless things.

"Hey." Ross turned around when she heard Will's voice. She blinked, furrowing her eyebrows to see him staring at the door. "Hey, do you guys see the..." He turned around and trailed off, staring ahead at them. Ross opened her mouth to asked what he was talking about until he stepped forward and peered down the next isle. What was he doing?

He began to look around the arcade, almost like he was looking for something that wasn't there. Suddenly, he spun around to the door, and Ross took a step forward. Was he okay?

She turned back towards the other boys, looking to see any of them were paying attention. They were still arguing with Keith. When she turned back around, Will was outside.

Ross walked up to the door and grabbed the handle, not yet going out. She watched at Will walked forward a bit, staring out towards the street, and then to the sky.

Was he having an episode? She knew it happened. There was no way Will was going to leave the Upside Down unscathed, after being in it so long. Ross had never actually known how serious these episode were until she'd been there for one. It had scared her, when he woke in the middle of the night, screaming and kicking at a monster that wasn't there. One thing she never understood, though, was why she didn't have them. Granted, she hadn't been in the Upside Down as long as he had, and maybe that was why.

"What's he doing?"

Ross jumped, looking to the side as Mike appeared next to her. He glanced down at her, and smiled apologetically. "Sorry."

She shook her head, looking back out towards Will. "Not sure, he just turned around and walked outside. Looked like he was looking for something."

Mike furrowed his eyebrows and pulled the door open, stepping outside. Ross put her foot in front of the door so it wouldn't close, and stood in the doorway.

"Will!" Mike said, take a few steps towards their friend. "You okay?"

Will gasped, turning around to look at Mike. He glanced at Ross and then turned to look at the skyline. She followed his gaze, frowning when she saw nothing unusual.

"Yeah," Will said. "I just...I needed some air." He was lying. She narrowed her eyes. Why was he lying?

"Come on," Mike said. "You're up on Dig Dug." He wrapped an arm around Will's shoulder and turned him around. Ross stepped back inside and held the door open for them. "Let's take that top score back, huh?"

"Meet the human brain."

Ross watched as Mr. Clarke sat a model of a brain down on his desk.

"I know. I know, it doesn't look like much," their teacher said. "A little gross even, right?"

Ross inwardly nodded, looking back down onto her desk where she'd been doodling.

Unlike the boys, she did not have a distinct interest in science. She did not win awards in science fairs, nor did she excell in math, or in english, or in any particular subject at all, besides history. History, Art, and P.E. were her best classes. History was interesting, easy to remember. Out of all her friends, she was best in the subject. In Art, much like Will, she was talented, and genuinely enjoyed doing it. And then P.E. was an easy way to keep active, helping with her ADHD. The only down fall of the class, was her asthma. She was made to sit out for any days they ran, and in games than involved lot of running, she had to stop if she got out of breath.

Otherwise, she was not the best in her classes, falling behind her friends. Sometimes it made her feel left out. While they were all

celebrating over their science awards, she just sat and watched. Luckily, she was apart of the AV Club. She couldn't think of any reason the boys *wouldn't* let her in, but knowing that even though she wasn't as smart as the rest of them, they still accepted her whenever it came to school activities.

As she continued to drown out Mr. Clarke, bless his poor soul, she drew random pictures all over her desktop. It wasn't that she found Mr. Clarke boring, it was just the subject. If he'd been their history teacher, she would be ecstatic. She genuinely like the guy. He was nice, and she always thought it funny when he talked about their curiosity "doors and voyages."

Suddenly, the door opened, and the principal walked in with a girl around Ross's own age.

She had red hair and blue eyes, was as tan as a redhead could probably get, and looked bored out of her mind. It was amusing. Hadn't even been in class for two seconds and she looked ready to die of boredom.

"Ah, this must be our new student," Mr. Clarke said.

"Indeed it is," their principal said, smiling. "All yours." He looked out at the students, and Ross threw her arms on her desk, attempting to block out the doodles. She'd gotten in trouble with multiple teachers for drawing on the desks. Mr. Clarke never particularly seemed to mine, yet she doubted his opinion would keep her from getting in trouble with the principal.

"Miss King," he said, giving her a small smile. "You can meet me in my office after class to discuss you're drawing habits."

Ross slumped, frowning as he turned around and left. Mike glanced back at her, and she could see the ghost of a smile on his face. Of course he found that amusing. Ross wouldn't doubt it if she spent her time during recess being teased by the boys.

"All right. Hold up." Clarke held a hand out as the new girl tried to skirt past his desk. "You don't get away that easy. Come on up, don't be shy."

Ross caught the girl roll her eyes as she retraced her steps to stand next to the desk.

"Dustin, drum roll." Two seats in front of her, Dustin closed his book and began to beat his hands agaisnt the desk.

"Class, please welcome, all the way from sunny California, the latest passenger to join us on our curiosity voyage," Ross smiled as Clarke rambled. "Maxine!" He turned and held his hands out towards her like he was presenting his newest science discovery.

Maxine shook her head. "It's Max."

"Sorry?" Mr. Clarke asked.

"Nobody calls me Maxine. It's Max," she corrected sharply.

"Ah, well, all aboard, Max," Clarke said.

Max headed towards the only open seat in the room, and all the boys turned in their seats, watching her as she went.

Ross blinked once she found Mike and Lucas looking at her expectantly. Was she missing something?

"MadMax," Lucas whispered, barely loud enough to hear.

"Oh!" Ross exclaimed loudly. When a few heads turned to her, and Mike and Lucas glared at her pointedly, she sunk in her seat a bit.

Was this new girl the same one who'd beaten Dustin's highscore? It did make sense. Just yesterday they'd discovered MadMax had broken the record, what were the odds a new girl named Max came in the next day?

Ross bounced on her feet as she made her way to the principal's office. Last time she'd been inside it, it was when Will had gone missing. The police had been asking them questions, and had also forbidden them from going out to look for Will. They didn't listen. And when they went out into the woods that night...

"Roslyn."

Ross looked up to see Mr. Coleman standing in front of the door to his office. He nodded, smiling.

"Hello, Mr. Coleman."

He opened his door, and she followed him in, closing the door behind her. Sitting herself in one of his chairs, she dropped her bag on the floor.

"Look, Mr. Coleman," she started. "I'm really sorry about the desks. I can't help it, I-"

"It's okay, Miss King. However, it *does* need to stop. Our custodians don't appreciate having to clean sketches of moutain ranges off the desks," Mr. Coleman said. "In fact, they've said they'd like you to invest those doodles into your art work, during art class."

"I know, I know," she said. "I'll come in after school to clean the desks, I *swear."*

"As appealing of an offer that is," he said," I have a different job for you."

Oh god, she thought. *He's gonna make me clean something else. Like the bathroom!*

"As you may know, we've gotten two new students today," he said. She blinked.

"Two? I know about Max, but-"

"The other one is Richard Tozier," Mr. Coleman said. "He's your age. Moved from Derry, Maine. I think you'll find him...quite interesting."

"What do you mean?" Ross asked.

"You'll be showing him around. This morning one of staff was allowed to show Maxine around, but everyone else is too busy at the moment to show Mr. Tozier."

"And you want me to do it?" Ross asked.

Mr. Coleman smiled.

"I'm sorry, sir, but-"

Behind her, the door opened.

"Ah, Mr. Tozier," Mr. Coleman said. "Glad your finally here."

Ross turned in her seat to look at this new kid. And when she did-

"Please, take a seat next to Miss King."

The boy eyed her before sitting down in the chair to her right. She stared, before forcing herself to look at Mr. Coleman.

"Mr. Tozier," Coleman said," this is Roslyn King, she's in your class. Roslyn, this is Richard Tozier."

"It's Richie," the boy corrected.

"Well, Richie, Miss King will be showing you around for the day," Mr. Coleman said. "And to start you off, she can take you to recess."

He smiled at the both of them. "There is your schedule, it will be the exact same as everyone else's. Have a good day."

Ross leaned forward, panic building in her chest. "Mr. Coleman, I-"

"Miss King, if you do not show Mr. Tozier around not only will you have to clean the desks, but there will be other consequences."

She sighed. "Okay."

Snatching up her bag, she headed straight for the door, expecting the new boy to follow.

The new boy. He was a stranger, but a familiar one, at that.

As Ross walked down the hallway, the boy caught up to her, walking next to her. She kept glancing at him, unsure that if it was real.

Finally, the kid stopped, staring at her, unamused. "Okay, what's the fucking deal? Why do you keep giving me that look? I've known you for five minutes and your acting like I asked you to suck my wang."

Ross blinked, his words snapping her out of whatever panic she'd been in. He was so...*vulgar.*

"I'm sorry, just..."

"Just *what?"*

"You look *exactly* like my friend."

And he did. Mike Wheeler stood before her, just with curlier hair, and coke bottle glasses that made his eyes look unnecessarily large. He wore jeans, a t-shirt that had **Derry** written across it, and a Hawaiian shirt over top.

"Really?"

"Yes," she said. "Spitting image. Just you're hair is a bit curlier, and you have glasses. May even be a bit taller."

Richie blinked at her a few times, taking her in.

"I guess you kinda look like one of my friends," he muttered awkwardly. Ross couldn't tell if he was serious, or telling her this to play off the situation.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Her name was Beverly. Her hair was red, too, just not as big. Her eyes were blue. And you're smaller than her. She was a total babe."

Ross felt the heat rush to her face. He'd just told her she looked like his friend, who was a total babe? Wow.

They stood for a few more seconds of silence before he spoke again.

"So...recess, Roslyn?"

She began walking again, and glanced at him as she did. "Call me Ross."

Disclaimer: I don't own the plot, idea, or characters of Stranger Things or It

A/N: So, if you haven't noticed, this is a crossover between Stranger Things and It (the movie, 2017). This is my first story, and I kinda really pulled it out of nowhere, just decided to write it. Honestly, I wasn't even considering putting it on here or anything until I finished it, and then didn't know what to do with it. Anyway, yes, I did just start this in season 2, because I felt like it. We're going to say the events of It happened during season 1 of ST, and that they were in 7th grade, as well. So that places all of them in the 8th grade during this story. Sorry for any spelling mistakes or grammatical errors. I hope you enjoy, if not, my deepest apologies.

- blockthewriter

2. Chapter 2

"There's no way that's Mad Max," Mike said, peering at the redhead as she skateboarded around the black top.

"Yeah," Will agreed, loosening his grip on the chain link fence in front of him. "Girls don't play video games."

"Well, Ross," Dustin said.

"She doesn't count," Mike said. "And even if girls did, you can't get 750,000 points on Dig Dug. I mean, it's impossible."

"But her name is Max," Lucas said.

"So what?" Mike asked.

"So, how many Maxes do you know?"

"I don't know."

"Zero. That's how many."

"Yeah, and she shows up at school the day after someone with her same name breaks our top score," Dustin added. "I mean, you're kidding me?"

"Exactly," Lucas said. "So, she's gotta be Mad Max. She's gotta be Mad Max."

"And plus she skateboards," Dustin said, watching her as she skated across cement. "So she's pretty awesome."

"Awesome?" Mike asked, making the other boys turn to him. "You haven't even spoken a word to her." It was true. As soon as they'd been let out for recess, Dustin and Lucas immediately took off after the new chick. They had yet to talk to Max, or even approach her.

"Hey, I don't have to," Dustin replied, turning back to where she was. "I mean, look at her. Shit, I've lost the target." Max was no longer skating around. The boys' eyes scoured the blacktop in search of her

long redhair, and Will found her first.

"Oh!" he said, pushing off from the fence. "There." The boys followed his gaze to Max. She was walking up steps to a side entrance of the school, skateboard tucked under her arm. Before she went in, she dropped a ball of paper into the trash.

Lucas and Dustin glanced at each other, before breaking into a run to the trashcan, Will and Mike not far behind. Once they reached it they immediately dug in, searching for the crumbled ball.

Dustin leaned head first into the bin, as Will and Lucas stood in front of it, attempting to look casual. Mike stood next to them, looking rather annoyed. Why were they searching in the trash for a piece of paper?

As a group of girls passed, they gave the boys a disgusted look, and Will, Mike, and Lucas all waved.

"Got it," Dustin said, standing back up. "There we go." He quickly unfurled it, so they could read it.

"Stop spying on me creeps," they all read in unison.

Will and Mike smiled lightly, glancing at Lucas and Dustin to gage their reactions. "Well, shit," Dustin muttered.

"William Byers?"

They four all turned to see their principal approaching them.

"Your mother's here."

Will glanced at the ground, and followed Mr. Coleman off the black top and into the school.

Mike, Lucas, and Dustin stood and watched, concern laced in their faces.

"Please don't tell me you idiots are dumpster diving, again?"

They all spun back around to see Ross standing at the door Max had

entered not even five minutes ago. And she wasn't alone.

Their jaws all dropped. "Holy shit," Dustin said.

A clone of Mike Wheeler stood next to her, dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and Hawaiian shirt. His hair was slightly curlier, and he stared down at them through large glasses. The lenses made his eyes look insanely large, and he blinked down at them.

"Who is that?" Lucas asked.

"It's Mike," Dustin murmured, pointing towards the boy slightly. He turned to the actual Mike, confused.

"The hell if it is," Mike said, glancing at his friends.

"Damn, you were right, carrot top," the boy said, looking at their red haired friend. "We do look exactly alike."

She nodded retreating down the steps to stand in front of her friends.

"Guys, this is Richie Tozier. Richie, these are my friends," Ross said, gesturing at them. "Lucas, Dustin, and Mike."

"Yeah, we're her *best* friends," Dustin added, eyeing the guy wearily.

"We're missing one," she said, glancing at Richie. She looked back to boys, raising her eyebrows. "Where's Will?"

"Left with his mom," Mike told her, not taking his eyes off of Richie.

"Oh, well, Will would usually be with us, too," Ross explained. "Uh, so, Richie's new, like that Max chick-"

"Mad Max," Dustin correct.

"Mad Max?" Richie asked.

"She isn't Mad Max," Mike said, rolling his eyes. "Girls don't play games, and if they do they aren't that good."

"Thanks, Wheeler," Ross remarked, raising an eyebrow.

"You don't count."

"Oh, fantastic."

"You know what I mean-"

"She *is* Mad Max," Lucas stressed. "There's no way its just a coincidence."

"Who the fuck is Mad Max?" Richie asked. "And what did she do?"

"I'll tell you later," Ross waved it off. Mike furrowed his eyebrows, glancing between the two.

"Why're you with him anyway?" Mike asked shortly, clearly annoyed.

Ross raised her eyebrows, looking at him skeptically. Why was he being snappy?

"Because. Coleman asked me to show his happy ass around, okay?" Ross said with clenched teeth. "Don't get all pissy with me."

Mike opened his mouth to respond, but the bell rang before he could even make a sound.

"C'mon, Richie," Ross said, glaring at Mike before she spun around. "I gotta show you to your next class."

The Tozier boy glanced at her friends again, narrowing his eyes at Mike, before turning to follow her.

"He's like your twin, Mike," Dustin said.

"Their called Dopplegangers," Lucas corrected him.

"Oh whatever."

For the rest of the day, Ross showed Richie around, getting to know him as much as she could. As much as it creeped her out to see him, Mike's hostility during recess only made her want to get to know him more. He didn't turn out to be terrible company. Yes, he did have a

horrible mouth, and most of his personality was made up of horrible sex jokes, but he was nice enough and genuinely had a good humor.

During lunch, Richie had to go figure things out with his parents and the principal, and so Ross sat at her usual table with the boys. Mike apologized quietly, and Ross forgave him, and then the rest of lunch the two listened to Lucas and Dustin talk about Mad Max.

Once the day was over, Ross led Richie outside to the bike racks, where her bike was waiting. None of the other boys were there yet, which she was silently thankful for. She smiled when he pulled his own bike out at the far end, and then wheeled it around back to her.

"Rode your bike here on the first day of school?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I don't live far," he told her, shrugging. "Besides, I didn't wanna have to trouble my parents with driving me three blocks."

"Fair point," she said, nodding.

"How about you, you live close, shortcake?" Richie asked her. She glanced around, shaking her head.

"No, not really. I basically live in the middle of the woods in this giant house," she said, giving a sarcastic smile. "It's fantastic."

"That's disgusting," Richie said. "What direction is it in?"

Ross pointed east.

"Mines that way, too," he told her, cracking a smile. "Wanna ride with me, dollface?"

Ross put on a sour face at the name, and shrugged. "Not sure, gonna rape me on the way home?"

"No, I don't want Krabs," he said, smirking.

Ross laughed, swinging her leg over her bike. "Sure, whatever."

Richie followed suit, and they pedalled eastward. As they left, Ross

glanced back. Standing at the bike racks were Lucas, Dustin, and Mike, all staring at her retreating form.

"Leftovers for dinner!" her dad yelled from somewhere within the house. Ross was in her room, finishing up what little homework they had for the day. Or at least, she was attempting to.

Growling at the math problem before her, she tossed her pencil down on her bed and rolled off of it. She'd radio one of the boys and see if they could help, and if they couldn't, whoops.

"Alright, Dad," she called back, exiting her room. Down the hall, and down the stairs, Ross found her dad shrugging on his coat in front of the door. She leaned agaisnt the rail, sighing quietly. "Where are you going?"

"Out," her father snipped, glancing at her. "And you're to stay in, while I'm gone."

She nodded. "Yeah, okay. How long will you be gone?"

"I'll be back before you leave for school," he answered, bending over to put on his shoes.

"Sure," Ross muttered, rolling her eyes slightly. Her dad either didn't notice, or decide to ignore it, and snatched his wallet from the table. "Are you gonna pay me back for all the money you took from me?"

"I was hoping you wouldn't notice," he confessed, sighing lightly.

"I always do."

"I know," he said, grabbing the door knob. "Maybe, we'll see. I gotta go."

"Bye," she said, watching as he swung the door open and closed it behind him. She waited until the sound of the car heading down the driveway faded into silence, and then made her way down the rest of the stairs.

"Asshole," she muttered, heading to the kitchen.

David King was many things, but a Proper Father was not one of them. Ever since Ross had been born he tended to neglect her, for lack of better word. The trouble between their parents only complicated things further, and all of them knew why. David King didn't want Ross and her mom. He wanted Will and Jonathan, and Joyce Byers. He wanted everything he couldn't have.

Sometimes it strained the relationship between Will and Ross, and yet they still managed to be best friends. She would never be able to hold her father's wants agaisnt Will, because it wasn't his fault. It wasn't Joyce's fault, it wasn't Jonathan's, it wasn't Will's, and it wasn't even Ross's. There was nothing to be done.

She made herself a small sandwhich and then took the back staircase up to the top floor. They lived in an old victorian house just on the outside of town, a mile into the woods. It was her mother's dream house, and Ross would never understand why. The rickety staircases creaked with every step, and the door hinges were rusty. The basement was a place Ross had only ever been to twice, and it was filled with broken furniture, and oddly enough, an old well. There were back staircases, and secret hallways between some rooms. When she was younger those hallways were her sanctuary, and she had memorized every nook and cranny within them. Sometimes she would still parade the halls, whenever she couldn't bear to talk or see her dad, or just wanted to explore the dusty place again.

Closing the door to her bedroom she set her sandwhich on her nightstand and picked up her walkie-talkie. It was time she radioed on of the boys for help, because god forbid she could do this math problem on her own.

She switched it on, pulling out the antenna, listening for a moment to see if any of them were on air. When not a single voice came through she pressed a button and said into the static," Guys, you there? I need help on my math."

No one answered.

"Please, guys, come in," she sighed, pulling her math book towards her. "I seriously have zero idea how to work this out. Over."

At the sound of silence, she tried a few more times, but to no avail. Of course. Just when she needed them they had to be off doing their own thing. Shrugging to herself, she closed her book and tossed the heavy item onto her floor with a loud thump. Just as she was about to push the antenna back in, she paused.

The boys and her usually always stuck to one channel, so they would always be able to get into quick contact with each other. If they weren't on their channel, they were on others, listening in on any conversations between strangers that sounded remotely interesting. Dustin and Ross often liked to hop on a channel with truckers, and listen to their banter. It had gotten them a lot of knowledge about trucker codes and slang. However, there was one channel specifically that she knew one of them visited frequently. Daily, in fact.

Ross spun the dial to the correct channel, and listened in. Maybe he would be on it? Dustin claimed to find him on the channel all the time.

"El, are you there? El?"

Ross frowned, biting her lip slightly. She wasn't surprised. Mike had confessed to her one starry night, that everyday he radioed to Eleven, in hopes of her answering. Just like the rest of them, Mike refused to believe their friend had perished. She had just disappeared. And just like when Will had disappeared, they would find her, and she would come home.

"It's me," Mike's voice crackled through. *"It's Mike. It's day 352. 7.40 p.m."* Ross sighed. It was nearly a year. A year since Will had gone missing, a year since they'd met El, and a year since she'd disappeared. Ross remembered it all clearly.

"I'm still here."

Mike paused.

"If you're out there, say something," he continued. *"Or-or give me a sign. I won't even say anything. Just...I wanna know if you're okay."*

More static. Ross stared down sadly at the walkie-talkie. God, did she

miss Eleven. What she wouldn't do to-

"Mike."

Ross jumped, diving forward to scoop the walkie-talkie into her hands. The voice sounded feminine, although it was hard to hear through the static. Was it her? Was it true? Had El just said something after nearly a year of silence?

Her heart raced at the thought. Maybe they could find her, maybe they could bring her home, and maybe they could-

"Mike?"

Ross paused.

"Hello, is that you?" Mike's voice came in, frantic and excited.

"Yeah, it's me, Dustin. What're you doing on this channel again?"

Ross swore silently. It was just Dustin.

"I've been trying to reach you all day. We were right, Max is Mad Max," Dustin said quickly.

"Yeah, I'm busy," Mike replied shortly.

"But we need to-he just got off," Dustin said loudly, like he was talking to someone else. He was probably with Lucas.

Ross knew she was right when Lucas's voice came through quietly, like he was a few feet away. *"What do we do now?"*

"We stick to the plan."

"Mike's not gonna like it."

"What's Mike not gonna like? And what're you doing on this channel?" she asked, feigning innocence.

"*There's Ross,"* Dustin said, sighing out of relief. "*We were looking for Mike. And you. And last time I checked, our party is not a dictatorship. It's a democracy."*

"What about our party? Where are you two at?" Ross asked, confused. What were they going on about?

"*What if Max says no?"*

"How can Max say no to these?" Ross winced as she heard a purring noise come through. Ever since his teeth had grown in, he'd taken to showing them off with a wide smile and a purr. At first it had been funny, but now it just made her cringe.

"Okay, Dustin, never do that again," she said.

"*Whatever. We'll tell you tomorrow, okay?"* Dustin bargained.

"Yeah, okay, sure," Ross agreed. "See you tomorrow. Tell Lucas I said goodnight."

"*Bye, Ross. She says goodnight."*

Ross shut off her radio before Lucas's response could be heard. What were they planning? She was assuming it had something to do with Max, and their small group of friends. Maybe they were gonna ask her to join.

Ross slept on the thought, leaving her homeword unfinished and her sandwhich untouched.

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, plot, or characters of Stranger Things or It

A/N: Second chapter, comin' atcha! I think I'm going to try and update once a week. No guarantees, but it's a schedule I'm going to try and keep to. Now, regarding the chapter, let me know what you think! I'm open to ideas or suggestions. I'd like to think I'm a flexible person, expecially with things like this. And thank you to all those who reviewed, followed, and favorited! I know it's a small thing, but it makes me happy. Anyway, I'm sorry for any spelling or grammatical mistakes. Hope you enjoy, and if not, I'm very sincerely sorry.

-blockthewriter

3. Chapter 3

Ross rolled her eyes, but couldn't help from smiling as the boys rolled up on their bikes singing the Ghostbusters theme song. The three donned their outfits appropriately, even carrying mock weapons and ghost catching supplies. They all smiled and nodded at her as they placed their bikes in the bike rack next to hers.

"Who you gonna call?" Ross looked over to see Will approaching behind them, also wearing a costume.

"Ghostbusters!" Will exclaimed, nodding his head. He stood next to Ross and bumped her shoulder happily.

Ross was the only one not wearing a costume. Their Ghostbusters costumes were store bought, or handmade, in Will's case. Her dad would refuse to spend the money on such a thing, and she didn't have the cash to get it herself. Besides, there were no girl ghostbusters, and no other girl in the movie was worth dressing up as. If anyone asked, she's claim she was a citizen that had a ghost problem.

She knew that although most people dressed up for halloween, she wouldn't be the only one that didn't. She knew for a fact Max and Richie wouldn't be dressed up. Not only would they have no time to get a costume ready, but no one had probably told them.

"Hey, Spengler!" Mike exclaimed.

"Egon!" Lucas shouted, sweeping in to give Will a hug.

"Venkman!"

Ross laughed, shaking her head as Dustin reached her and threw an arm around her shoulder.

Mike leaned forward, reaching for Lucas's nametag, and the laugh diminished. "Whoa, whoa," he said, frowning.

"What?" Lucas asked.

"Why are you Venkman?"

"Oh god," Ross muttered, rolling her eyes. Dustin's arm dropped from her shoulders as he shook his head slightly.

"Because I'm Venkman," Lucas declared, like it was obvious.

"No, I'm Venkman," Mike retorted, poking at his own tag. Ross glanced at both of theirs, and they both had the name Venkman stitched in. She sighed. Just another thing for them to argue about.

"Why can't there just be two Venkmans?" Will asked, glancing between the two.

"Because there's only one Venkman in real life," Mike argued. "We planned this months ago. I'm Venkman, Dustin's Stantz, you're Egon, Ross is a citizen, and you're Winston."

"Guys. No one cares," Ross said loudly, trying to finish the argument before it went to far.

"I specifically didn't agree to Winston," Lucas claimed, waving his hands around. Ross huffed, turning away to look around. She didn't want to have to deal with the two all day.

She then caught sight of Richie, shoving his bike in the stands just across the walk. Glancing at her friends once, she walked over to him, noticing that, just like she predicted, he wouldn't be dressed up. He noticed her approaching and gripped his backpack straps, turning towards her.

"Hey, dollface," he greeted. Ross scrunched up her nose. She wasn't exactly sure why he called her that, he'd only known her for about day, if that. She felt the need to give him a nickname, but couldn't think of a clever one just yet.

"Richard," she settled on, smirking as he squinted his eyes at her. "Happy Halloween."

"You too," he nodded, relaxing into a more comfortable stance. She couldn't help but notice that he wore another Hawaiian shirt, unbuttoned, over his t-shirt. Was that his style?

"Why're your friends all dressed up?" he asked her, nodding to the

boys who were still arguing. She rolled her eyes and turned back to him.

"Most people dress up to school on Halloween," she explained. "Their arguing over whose who and whatnot."

"But no one else is dressed up." Ross looked up at Richie, frowning.

"What?"

"Look." He pointed to some kids that were walking their way. Like Ross and Richie, they wore normal clothes. She cursed under her breath. "Ha! You're friends are a bunch of fucking losers." He laughed, pointing as they all seemed to notice that no one else had dressed up.

"Shut the fuck up," Ross snapped, glaring at him.

The bell rang, and Ross sighed, stepping forward a few feet to grab Mike's sleeve.

"C'mon, you guys," she said, tugging slightly. Mike turned, looking at her, before his eyes fell behind her on Richie.

"Yeah," he muttered. "Yeah, let's go."

Walking through the halls was practically torture. Her and Richie trailed behind the boys, who were being laughed at by everyone they passed. She knew that she wasn't being laughed at, but it still frustrated her to know her friends were the subject of the ridicule. Part of her wished she had dressed up, too, so they wouldn't have to take the teasing alone.

"Who you gonna call?" one student said loudly as they passed. "The Nerds!"

Richie racked out a laugh, quickly trying to pass it off as a cough as Ross, Mike, and Lucas turned to glare at him. She snatched his elbow and pulled him up next to her at her locker.

"Try being a little less rude," she said, spinning in her combination and opening her locker.

"It's not my fault your friends didn't get the memo to not dress up," Richie defended, a smile on his lips. "Also not my fault they chose the nerdiest costumes ever."

"You don't like ghostbusters?"

"You do?" Richie asked, crinkling his nose. "My god, you're a nerd, too!"

"I'm also your only friend," she said, grabbing a few books and stuffing them in her bag.

"Whoa, who ever said I wanted to be your friend?" he asked, squinting at her through his thick lenses.

"Well, considering the fact you asked me to ride home with you yesterday, and that you walked with me inside today, and that you're talking with me right now, all tells me that you're at least acquainted with me, and you enjoy my presence to an extent," she said, shutting her locker swiftly. "And your about to walk with me to our next class. If that doesn't say you consider me a friend, even just a little bit, then rock's are soft."

"I can tell you about something else that *isn't* soft," Richie said, smiling widely.

Ross made a sour face and pushed passed him, not surprised when he followed her. "You're disgusting."

"So, you gonna go trick-or-treating tonight?" Will asked Richie. Ross, Will, and Richie were all heading towards the bike racks. School had just gotten out, and they were free for the rest of the day.

Ross was a bit surprised at how quickly Will had gotten acquainted with Mike's look-a-like. She'd at least expected him to be shocked at his presence. Apparently, one of the other boys had gotten a hold of him last night and told him about Richie. But it was still odd to see how quickly he accepted him compared to the other boys. Lucas and Dustin were too absorbed in Max to really notice much of anything, but Mike seemed the most reluctant to speak to Richie. Perhaps it

had to do with the fact they were nearly identical. Ross was sure that would freak her out, too.

"Probably not, Willington," Richie confessed, calling Will by another one of his odd nicknames. "I just moved here, and I don't feel like getting raped over some fucking candy."

Ross snorted, and even Will smiled a bit. Another thing she'd noticed, is that Richie had quite the mouth. None of the boys really seemed to mind, except maybe Mike and Lucas.

"Oh, well, if you decide to go out, we'll be trick-or-treating," Will said, much to Ross's surprise. "Meet us on Maple Street at 7:00 if you wanna come with."

Richie mounted his bike and furrowed his eyebrows. "Yeah, probably not gonna happen. I'd have to cancel my date with Ross's mom."

"Don't got one," Ross said," so it looks like you're free."

Richie's face dropped for a moment, guilt and sorrow crossing his face before he smirked again, eyes growing cheery.

"We'll see," he said shortly, leaving out any smart remark. He bid the both of them goodbye and peddled off.

Max kicked up her skateboard into her hands, sighing to herself as she approached Billy and the car. He was smoking, leaning agaisnt the back of the vehicle as if he hadn't a care in the world.

"You're late again," he said to her as she walked by. She stopped, turning to look at him.

"Yeah, I had to get catch up homework," she explained, knowing that it still wouldn't ease his annoyance.

"Jesus, I don't care," he said, turning his head slightly. "You're late again, and you're skating home. Do you hear me?"

Max glared at him, swinging open the door and getting inside the car.

They zoomed along the road rustling piles of leaves, blasting rock and breaking the speed limit. Max stared straight ahead, attempting to ignore Billy and his obnoxious existence, and trying not to draw any attention. Of course, Billy decided otherwise, and opened his big mouth.

"God, this place is such a shithole," he muttered, prompting a response from Max.

She thought of the school, her classes, the weather and her classmates. She thought of the two stalkers dressed as ghostbusters, and Mr. Clarke and his curiosity voyages. "It's not that bad."

"No?" Billy asked, glancing at her. He reached over and rolled down her window, dramatically inhaling through his nose. "Mmm!"

He pinched his nose, letting his voice go nasally. "You smell that, Max? That's actually shit. Cow shit."

She breathed in with annoyance. "I don't see any cows," she said, rolling her window back up.

"Clearly, you haven't met the high school girls," he replied. Then he scoffed, glancing at her. "So what, you like it here now?"

"No," Max said, furrowing her eyebrows and shaking her head. This place would never be California.

"Then why are you defending it?"

"I'm not," she said, looking at him sharply.

"Sure sounds like it."

"It's just we're stuck here," she said, shaking her head. "So..."

"You're right," Billy agreed. "We're stuck here." He looked over at her darkly. "And whose fault is that?"

Max rolled her eyes, cocking an eyebrow. "Yours," she muttered under her breath.

"What'd you say?" Billy asked.

"Nothing," she said quickly. She mentally kicked herself.

"Did you say it's my fault?"

"No."

"You know whose fault it is," Billy went on. "Say it."

She ignored him. Max wouldn't give into his demands.

"Max...say it."

Why did he have to be like this? Why couldn't he be fun, and nice? Why did she have to get a shitbag of a brother who was just so condescending and angry and-

"SAY IT!" he shouted, leaning over into her face. She jumped slightly, but stayed still.

Billy acted out, switching gears and accelerating, stomping on the gas. He turned up the music and began pounding the wheel, mouthing the words to the songs.

Max spotted something, and leaned forward in her seat. Four kids, three boys wearing ghostbuster costumes, and one girl with curly redhair, all pedalling down the road on their bikes. And they were all in Billy's way.

"Billy, slow down," Max said, concern lacing her features.

"Oh, these your new hick friends?" he asked.

"No!" Max said, not technically lying. "I don't know them."

"Oh, I guess you won't care if I hit 'em then?" he asked.

Max tensed, beginning to panic.

"I get bonus points if I get em all in one go?"

"No, Billy, stop," she said, turning to him. "It's not funny." He just

looked at her, bobbing his head to the music.

He revved the engine, gaining more speed. Max saw two of them glance behind them at the car.

"Billy, come on, stop it. It's not funny. Stop!" Max yelled. "Billy, stop it!"

Max reached over, yanking the wheel to the left. The car lurched to the other side of the road, and the group of friends veered off the edge of the road, some even falling off of their bikes.

"Yeah! That was a close one, huh?" Billy shouted at Max. She looked behind her out the back window, just in time to see the redhead hurl a rock at their car. It hit the back with a thunk, and Billy glared through the rear view mirror, yet did nothing about it.

They drove off, Max staring at their angry and confused expressions.

Ross rolled into the leaves, tumbling off her bike as she jerked off the side of the road. She got to her feet, watching as a blue car sped by, music thundering from inside. Quickly, she scooped up a rock, anger coursing through her, and hurled it at the car. It hit the back with a thunk.

"FUCKING ASSHAT!" She shouted, flipping them off despite the fact they most likely couldn't see her.

"Holy shit!" Dustin shouted as Lucas pulled him off the ground. Mike dropped his bike to help, staring after the speeding car. "Was that..."

"Mad Max," Lucas breathed out.

Ross spun around, glaring hard.

"Mad Max?" she spat. "You're girlfriend almost fucking killed us! What the fuck!"

"She's not my girlfriend," Lucas said, frowning. Ross stared.

"*That's* what you're concerned with right now?" she yelled, spinning

back around.

Who did she think she was?

"Plus, it wasn't her driving," Dustin added. "She isn't old enough."

"Okay, so what?" Ross challenged. "She was still in the car. The car that almost *ran us over!"*

"It probably wasn't her fault," Lucas defended. "Don't get angry at her."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Ross said, throwing her hands in the air. "Let me turn you into a bloody skid mark on the highway and see how *you* feel!"

"Hey, Ross," Mike said, grabbing her arm. "Calm down. Let's just get back to your house, okay?"

She closed her eyes, noticing how Mike squeezed her arm reassuringly. Taking a deep breath, she nodded. "Yeah, sure. Sorry for getting worked up," she apologized to Dustin and Lucas. "I don't take well to people trying to kill me."

"It's cool," Dustin said.

"Yeah," Lucas nodded, "plus, you landed a pretty nice hit on the car."

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A/N: I think it's been a week, not really sure. But here's chapter 3, anyway. As you see, I expirimented with a bit of Max's pov. Not sure if I'll do it again, mainly bc i'm not sure where I'll have the chance to within the rest of the story. If any of you guys want another Max pov, let me know and I'll see if I can fit anything in. If you guys want anything regarding the story, or have any questions, really just let me know. Thanks to those who've reviewed and such, means a lot to get some feedback! I might start responding to those reviews below the A/N after each chapter, but I haven't quite decided. Anyway, sorry for any misspelled words or grammar mistakes, I'm not too good at

going through and editing. I hope you enjoy, and if not, that's a shame, and I grant you my authentic apologies.

4. Chapter 4

Will and Jonathan pulled up in front of Mike's house, and Ross waved enthusiastically. After they'd made it to Ross's house, she gathered her stuff to stay at Mike's and they headed back into town. Her costume was at Lucas's, where his mom had graciously made her a Rogue costume. Rogue, or Theif, was her position in Dungeons and Dragons, much like how Dustin was a Bard, and Mike was their Paladin.

Jonathan honked, only making Ross smile wider. From what Will had said, Jonathan would be joining them. It was understandable. He'd been kidnapped and brought to another dimension when he'd been by himself, and Joyce was a concerned person. Ross wasn't at all surprised she sent Jonathan to watch over the boy.

She watched however, as Jonathan talked to Will for a few moments, and then Will left the car by himself. Maybe plans had changed?

"Will!" Mike called as their friend jogged towards them.

"Egon!"

"Yeah, you ready for tonight, man?" Ross asked, throwing an arm around him once he'r reached them.

"Yeah," Will exclaimed, high fiving the boys. They all gathered in a circle, checking out the last minute details of their costumes, and so Will could get a look at Ross's.

"That's awesome!" Will said, reaching forward to feel the fabric of her cloak.

"I know, right?" Ross asked giddly. To say she felt cool in the costume was a serious understatment. She felt completely and utterly badass. "And look, it's got a hood!"

She reached back and flipped it up, smiling widely. "Lucas's mom is an angel!"

"Aw! Well, aren't you cute? Little exterminators!" Ross tried not to snort as the old lady completely butchered their costumes. The boys all faltered, glancing at each other, and Will lowered his camera slightly. She held out her bowl of candy, which was filled with more 3 Muskateers.

Dustin reached in a grabbed a handful, the boys and Ross quickly following in line. She dashed down the steps and back to the street before the lady could ask about her costume. She wouldn't get it, and would probably even disapprove.

"If I get another 3 Muskateers, I'm gonna kill myself," Lucas exclaimed, rolling his eyes. Ross muttered her agreement, glancing into her bag. This year, 3 Musketeers were in nearly every bowl. She was sick of nougat.

"What's wrong with 3 Musketeers?" Dustin asked.

"What's wrong with 3 Muskateers?" Lucas repeated, like he couldn't believe Dustin had just asked that.

"No one likes 3 Musketeers," Mike said.

"Yeah, it's just nougat," Will agreed.

"You think if I shove enough of this shit down my throat I'll choke to death on it?" Ross asked, tossing one of the candy bars behind her. She didn't need so many, and didn't consider it a waste to throw it out.

"Can you try and find out?" someone asked from behind. Ross jumped, spinning around and swinging her bag outwards. It hit whoever had come up behind her, and they cursed loudly. Ross groaned when she saw who it was.

"God damn it, Richie," she said, reaching out to punch him in thr shoulder. "Don't do that."

"You sure are fucking jumpy," he noted, giving her a lopsided grin.

"Hi, Richie," Will greeted waving.

"Yeah man, what' up?" Lucas asked.

"Where's your costume?" Mike deadpanned, looking at Richie with bored eyes. Ross frowned.

"Don't got one," he said. "I was gonna dress up as Ross, but I figured that was too gruesome for the public." Ross stuck her tongue out at him, but only received a wink in return.

"Anyway," Dustin said, getting back to the conversation they'd been having. "3 Musketeers is definitely top three for me. It's not *just nougat."*

"Top three?" Lucas asked as they began walking again. Richie fell in step with them on the other side of Will, swinging his bag as he walked.

"Top three!"

"Oh, god, give me a break," Mike groaned.

"Seriously, I can just eat a whole bowl of nougat. Straight up," Dustin continued as they walked out onto the street.

Suddenly, someone jumped out in front of them, screaming, holding a knife. They all jumped, and Mike reached out to grab Ross's arm. Lucas screamed, and she dropped her bag. The candy spilled out onto the street.

"Holy shit! You should have seen the looks on your faces," Max exclaimed as she pulled off her mask. Ross glared, rolling her eyes. Of course.

"And you?" she asked Lucas, and smile on her face. "Who screams like that? You sound like a little girl."

Ross bent down, reaching to pick up her candy.

"Fucking asshat," she muttered, listening as Max asked the guys if they were gonna follow her.

"I heard we should hit up Loch Nora. That's where the rich people

live, right?"

Dustin and Lucas both glanced at each other before letting out a cheer, and following her. Ross huffed, stuffing a few candy bars into her bag. Will followed after them, while Mike bent down to help Ross, and Richie stood beside them.

"Who's the chick?" he asked, pushing his glasses further onto his nose.

"Max," Mike answered, his voice hard. "She's new, too." He dropped some candy into her bag, sighing a bit.

Ross gritted her teeth. "Dumbass nearly hit us earlier today," she hissed, standing up. "Can't believe they still wanna hang out with her."

"She nearly hit you guys? With what? A car?" Richie asked.

"Yeah. But Ross threw a rock at their car and left a pretty big mark," Mike added. "C'mon, let's go."

They went to catch up with the others, and Ross decided that tonight was going to be horrible. Max just irritated her, from the fact that Dustin and Lucas had some infatuation with her, to the feeling that they were some how replacing El. Maybe that's why Mike was acting strange around Richie. She already knew he didn't exactly like Max, and probably for the same reason, but maybe he thought Richie was intruding their party as well.

The whole way to Loch Nora, Mike, Will, Ross, and Richie trailed behind Max and the boys, not saying much. Will kept his camera up, recording everything that happened. He'd already explained to Richie that he couldn't say anything bad because it wasn't his camera and he would most likely get in trouble. Richie agreed, and resorted to keeping his mouth shut. After all, if you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all.

"Another full-size," Dustin said ahead of them. "Like, seriously, rich people are suckers."

He paused, glancing at Max. "Wait. You're not rich, right?"

Richie snorted, and Ross glanced at him.

"No, I live up Old Cherry Road," Max told them, as if living on Cherry Road was a disgrace in itself.

"Oh."

"No, it's fine," Max said. "I mean, the streets good for skating."

"Yeah, totally tubular."

Ross decided then and there to tune out the conversation.

"So, Richie," she said loudly, deciding to make small talk. "Where do you come from, anyway?"

"Derry, Maine," he answered without missing a beat.

"Really?" Will asked. "What's Maine like?"

"Different from here, that's for sure," Richie said. "But it isn't bad here. Not as terrible as I thought."

"Did you have a lot of friends back in Derry?" Ross asked. She didn't exactly see Richie as one of the popular kids. For one, he was tall, pale, and skinny, a lot like Mike. He looked like a nerd, and his coke bottle glasses did nothing to help his situation.

"Not really," he said honestly. "I only had about three *really* close friends. Over the summer I became friends with a few more people, and then I moved."

"That sucks," Mike said. Richie nodded.

"Why did you move," Ross asked. "If you don't mind me asking."

Richie paused, choosing his words carefully. "It's complicated. Derry wasn't exactly the safest town anymore. My parents decided to move."

"Wasn't safe?" Ross questioned, frowning. "What happened?"

"Oh, just a few missing kids," Richie said casually. Ross, Mike, and

Will however, blanched.

"Missing kids?"

"How many?"

"Did you find any of them?"

Richie blinked, taken back by their reactions. "Uh, yeah. Not exactly sure how many. And no...they didn't find any of them." He paused for a second.

"At least, not alive," he said quietly. Ross looked at him.

He looked somber, eyes distant, like he was remember something that had happened. Was he somehow involved with the missing kids? Did he know some of them?

"Stop! My ears are hurting," they heard Max exclaim from up ahead.

Mike turned to Will. "Did you agree to this?"

Will pointed the camera at him, before lowering it and shutting it off.

"To her joining our party," Mike continued. Ross grew quiet. She knew it.

"It's just for Halloween," Will answered.

"You should have checked with me," Mike said. "Or Ross."

"Well, they were excited," Will tried to reason. "I guess I thought you'd be okay with it."

"She's ruining the best night of the year." he said bluntly. Will, Ross, and Richie all pulled to a stop as Mike continued ahead.

"It's not your fault, Will," Ross said, turning to her friend. "He's just mad that no one considered to ask him."

Will glanced at her, shaking his head. "We both know that's not true."

Sighing, Ross handed Richie her bag of candy and chased after Mike

before the boy could protest. She caught up with him, catching a hold of his shoulder.

"Hey, don't get mad at Will just because they didn't ask us," Ross said, sliding her hand down to grip his arm. "It wasn't his fault."

Mike glared, looking off towards a group of kids walking up the street. "They still should've asked us," he said sharply.

"I know they should've," she agreed," but that doesn't mean we're gonna go snapping at everyone who's around us. You know Will's having a tough time, he doesn't need to worry about you being mad at him on top of it. And he's right. I bet that by tomorrow Dustin and Lucas will forget about Max."

Mike scoffed. "You're acting like they're the only ones trying to replace her."

"What?" Ross asked, confused. Who else was trying to replace El?

"Richie," he said spitefully. "He just a replacement, trying to barge in on our party. But it's just us. Just you, Will, Lucas, Dustin, Me, and Eleven. That's how it should be, and how it should stay."

Ross pulled her hand away. "You think I'm trying to replace her?" she asked quietly. Was she? No. No one could ever replace Eleven. But that didn't mean they couldn't make new friends.

Mike opened his mouth, but Ross cut him off before he could get a word out. "I would *never* do that, Mike. You know that. I miss her just as much as you do, I knew her *just* as much as you did. You aren't the only one who lost her!" she exclaimed, growing frantic. *How dare he accuse her of replacing El?*

"I miss her like crazy, and no one will *ever* replace her, but that doesn't mean I can't make new friends," Ross said, getting louder. Mike listened, anger and sorrow flying through his eyes. "El wouldn't want us to hold back. She would want us to move on! It's time you did."

"She's not dead," Mike snapped.

"I never said she was!" Ross bit back. "But if she was coming back, if she *could* come back, she would've said something! She would leave a letter some where, find a way to communicate with us, or *answer you on the damned radio.* She might still be out there, I *know* she is, but as much as I want her to, she isn't coming back, Mike."

There was a few seconds of silence as her words settled in, biting away at their thoughts and questions. Mike looked like he was about to respond. To argue or agree, she'd never know, because someone yelled behind her. Ross spun around at the familiar voice, and saw Richie standing in the middle of the street, facing a group of retreating children, middle finger up.

"Go suck your mom's dick, Assholes!" he shouted, taking a step forward. At his feet lay Ross's candy bag, and a few feet from that was Will's camera. But Will was no where to be found.

"Where's Will?" Ross shouted, breaking into a run back to Richie. He spun around, and looked to the ground.

"I don't know," Richie said. "One of those fuckers knocked him over, he was just right there!"

Mike called Will's name, scanning the area, as did Ross. "We gotta find him," she said frantically. "Where could he have gone?"

"Split up, go!" Mike exclaimed, running off to one of the drive ways. Richie headed down another, and Ross went across the street. She check behind bushes, in drive ways, and even peered into some cars before Richie's voice reached her ears.

"I found him!" Her and Mike were at his side in an instant, and he led them up a drive way and down some stairs. Will was crouched up against a brick wall, eyes closed and breathing heavy.

Mike reached out a grabbed his shoulder, and Will gasped, opening his eyes. "Will, what's wrong?" He kneeled down in front of Will, grasping his shoulders. Ross kneeled down beside him.

"I couldn't find you. Are you hurt?"

Will looked around, confused and afraid, and Ross reached out to

grab his hand. She heard pounding footsteps and looked up to see Dustin, Lucas, and Max round the corner.

"Holy shit!"

"Is he okay?" Lucas asked, panicked. They all were, except perhaps Max and Richie. They were just confused.

"I don't know," Mike said.

"Will, are you okay?" Ross asked, tugging on his hand. "Will?"

"I'm gonna get you home, okay?" Mike said. "I'm gonna get you home. Hold on." Mike pulled Will to his feet and Dustin stepped forward to help.

"All right, take it easy."

However, Mike pushed him off, shaking his head. "I got him, I got him."

Dustin took a step back. "Mike."

Ross stood, taking a step forward.

"Keep trick-or-treating. I'm bored anyways."

"Mike," Ross said, taking a few steps up the stairs after him. "I'm coming with you."

"No," Mike protested, turning back to glance at her. "You stay. He'll be fine."

"No, I'm going," she urged, catching up beside him. Mike stopped with Will, turning to face her fully.

"No. Ross, stay," he said sternly. He glanced back at the others, eyes landing on Richie. "Keep trick-or-treating. I'll take Will home and you can come home later."

She faltered. What was his deal? Without waiting for an answer, he left, taking Will with him.

"What's wrong with him?"

Ross turned to see Max looking quizzically at the boys. They both glanced at Max, then to Richie, and then to Ross. She shook her head.

The remainder of the night was spent trick-or-treating. Ross and Richie eventually went off on their own, as Lucas, Dustin, and Max were unintentionally ignoring them. They bid them goodnight, explaining Richie was going to walk Ross back to Mike's, since it was closest, and then he'd head home from there.

Dustin and Lucas hugged Ross, and told her goodnight, claiming they'd see her the next day. She left without so much as sparing Max a glance. She nearly felt bad. Nearly.

On the way to Richie's they discussed small things, such as what Hawkin's was like, how the people were different from people in Derry, and which town was more boring. Of course, Ross knew that Hawkins was far from uninteresting, but she told Richie none of the supernatural occurrences. She didn't speak of Will's disappearence. She didn't say a word about El.

She wasn't sure she ever would. El was a secret. Someone special that Ross and her friends would never tell anyone. It was between them only. Eleven was sacred. She was one of them. Ross wasn't sure if she could bring herself to utter her name. She missed Eleven so much it almost physically hurt.

And aside from the secrecy and meaning behind El and everything they'd been through, Ross wasn't sure Richie would even believe it. To anyone on the outside it would seem ridiculous. Monsters, and alternate dimensions, and girl's with mind powers. It was insane. Ross wouldn't believe it if she hadn't experienced it.

"See," Ross said, swinging her half empty bag of candy as she walked," Derry is automatically more interesting because of the missing kids. Sure, the people up there are more rude, but that beats the fact that everyone here is just boring to talk to."

"You're right," Richie agreed. "I'm talking to the most boring of them

all."

Ross snorted. "How did you make any friends in Derry?" He shrugged.

"Not sure," he said honestly. "I'm surprised they put up with my bullshit as long as they did."

Ross was quiet for a few moments before asking," What were they like? Your friends?"

Richie pondered on the question, kicking rocks along the sidewalk.

"They were different. Like me," Richie said. His tone was quieter, more somber. He missed them. "There was Eddie. He lived with his mom, and she was overweight and always worrying about him. Seven layers of fucked up, and an additional three of irrational concern for her son. Tricked him into thinking he had this sickness, and was allergic to everything, and made him a major germaphobe.

"Stan the Man. He's Jewish, and was the Rabbi's son. Always nervous. When he had his Bar Mitzvah he kinda blew up in front of everyone. I was there. It was kinda funny.

"Then there was Bill," Richie continued. "He was kinda like our leader. But he stuttered, a lot. He was pretty good at drawing. Uh, his little brother, Georgie...he was one of the missing kids."

Ross snapped her head up to look at Richie. "One day he went outside to play in the rain, and just never came back. People think he was swept into the drain pipes. He was the first to go missing."

"Shit," Ross muttered, looking back to the ground.

"Yeah. His parents have never really been the same. Neither has Bill, but he's trying."

Ross thought about what it'd've been like had Will never been found. Would Ross have moved? Dustin? Mike, Lucas?

"This it?"

Ross looked up to see Mike's house looming just to their left. She'd

told Richie it was the Cul-de-sac on Maple Street. She turned to face him, sighing.

"Thank you," she said. "I guess I had *some* fun tonight."

Richie chuckled.

"And for the record," she continued," I'll always be here to talk. I know that's cliche, because while we may not be best friends, I don't want you to feel like you left the only friends you'll ever have."

Richie gave her a smile, one she'd not yet seen yet. It was sincere.

"Goodnight, Roslyn."

"Goodnight, Richard."

Richie and Ross went seperate way, Ross up the sidewalk to the front door, and Richie down the street to his own house.

Rather than knocking on the front door, she slipped inside. Mr. Wheeler was passed out on the couch, tv playing some late night shows. Karen, Mike's mom, must've been somewhere upstairs. Ross knew that Mike's dad slept on the chair. She also knew there were some problems between his parents. She wasn't surprised.

Mr. Wheeler was the most boring, unhelpful, and laziest man she'd ever seen. He was only ever on his La-Z-Boy, watching TV, reading the paper, or telling people to watch their language. Ross felt bad. At least her dad pay her attention.

She tiptoed through the kitchen and opened the basement door, careful not to wake anyone. Shutting the door behind her, she started down the steps.

"It's day 353."

She stopped.

"I had a bad day today," Mike said. "I don't know. I...I guess I wish you were here."

He was talking to El. Or, at least trying to. Ross sat down on the steps, wrapping her arms around her legs.

"I mean, we all do," he continued. But did he really think that? Like he said, he thought Ross was trying to replace her. But she wasn't. She couldn't.

"If you're out there, just please give me a sign," Mike pleaded.

Ross felt tears brim at her eyes. No. She wouldn't cry. She missed El, and she felt horrible that Mike thought Ross was replacing her, but she *would not cry.*

"Eleven?"

Too late. Ross scrunched up her face and squeezed her eyes shut, and the tears came out. She hated crying. The last time she cried was when Eleven sacraficed herself for them. 353 days ago.

"Ross?"

She opened her eyes, meeting Mike's brown ones. He was at the bottom of the steps, still dressed in his ghostbusters costume. Instead of saying anything, she squeezed her eyes shut again and buried her face in her arms.

She heard his footsteps as he climbed the stairs to sit down next to her. Trying to comfort her, he wrapped an arm around her.

"It's okay, Ross," he whispered. She shook her head. "I miss her, too. It's okay."

"But it's not," she said, her voice cracking. "It's not okay. She's gone and I miss her *so* much, and I don't know what to do."

He pulled her into him, laying his head down on her shoulder.

"Why did she have to go?" Ross asked, trying to stifle her sobs. "It's not fair. Why did she have to leave?"

"I don't know," Mike told her. "I don't know." She sniffed, lifting her head from her hands to look at him.

"I'm sorry," she apologized, although she wasn't sure what for.

Mike looked up at her sympathetically, but it quickly turned to concern.

"Ross? You're nose," he said. "It's bleeding." She frowned, bringing a hand to her upper lip. When she looked at it, her fingertips were stained a crimson red.

Disclaimer: I don't know the ideas, plots, or character of Stranger Things or IT

A/N: Sooo, I've decided I would publish this on Quotev, as well. It's under the same title, so if you like that site better for whatever reason, it's there. But, there is only one chapter out on the Quotev one. I'll update that one like I do this one, a chapter per week. On other news, I've actually started reading *It* and I'm enjoying it. I've only ever seen the movies before I started reading book. The mini-series when I was younger, and the 2017 version when it came out, and several times since then. Have any of you guys read the book, or have you just seen the movies? Anywho, my apologies for any grammatical or spelling errors, I'll try to be better in the future. Hope you enjoy this chapter, and if not, terribly sorry.

- blockthewriter

5. Chapter 5

"The case of Phineas Gage is one of the greatest medical curiosities of all time. Phineas was a railroad worker in 1848 who had a nightmarish accident. A large iron rod was driven completely through his head."

Ross perked up, looking away from the doodle on her paper(a small depiction of a bird with sunglass) to Mr. Clarke, who was at the front of the classroom. The words '*rod was driven completely through his head'* had undeniably caught her attention.

"Phineas miraculously survived," Mr. Clarke said. "He seemed fine. And physically, yes, he was.

"But his injury resulted in a complete change to his personality. So much so that friends that knew him started reffering to him as 'No Longer Gage'."

Will, who was sitting right in front of Ross, turned a bit, looking at someone in the back of the class. Ross looked as well, just in time to see Max turn her head towards the window outside. She furrowed her eyebrows, frowning.

"At the time this was known as the American Crowbar Case, although it wasn't-"

The door to the classroom banged open, and Ross spun in her seat to see Dustin stumble into the room. He'd been late today, for reasons the others hadn't know. Lucas had wondered if he'd gotten sick from eating so much nougat.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Clarke," Dustin panted, heading towards his seat. "Really, I'm so sorry. Please continue with the class. Don't mind me."

Ross arched an eyebrow as he slung his bookbag from his shoulder," Really, continue, please. Thanks."

"Although it wasn't a crowbar," Mr. Clarke began again, dismissing Dustin's unusual tardiness. "It was a rod, as I said."

Dustin turned in his seat, and immediately the other boys, and Ross, all leaned forward. "We have to meet," he whispered. "All of us. At lunch. AV Club."

"Why?" Mike asked. Ross had the sneaking suspicious it had something to do with Dustin's tardiness, but he wasn't sure what could be so important to talk about that they had to have a meeting.

"I have something that you won't believe."

Ross sat back in her chair, as did the boys, thinking hard. What did Dustin have to show them? She noticed when he spun in his seat the other way, looking to the back of the class at Max.

Shit.

"AV Club, lunch," he whispered to the new girl. Ross frowned. He was inviting Max? What happened to '*Just for Halloween'?*

"Dustin!" Mr. Clarke snapped suddenly.

Dustin turned back towards the front. "Yes, my lord?"

"Would you care to join the class now?" Mr. Clarke asked sternly. He rarely ever got annoyed or strict in class, only when kids were being especially disruptive. Ross wouldn't exactly say Dustin was being disruptive, but maybe it irked Clarke to see one of his best students not paying attention.

"Please!" Dustin exclaimed. "Yes." He reached for his bag, digging for his book.

"The case of Phineas Gage."

"Phineas Gage."

"Page 104."

"104, 104."

"Focus."

"Focusing. Focusing."

Ross heard someone snort. She looked to the right side of the room, where Richie was seated. He was looking at Dustin with amusement, and then he caught Ross's eye. He flipped her off.

Ross smirked, facing back forward.

It was lunch time, and they all had met in the A.V. Club room. Max was there, and so was Richie. He'd decided to tag along, because, *'Whatever nerdy things you guys are doing in that closet of yours is better than sitting alone at lunch'.* It finally struck Ross that, aside from the Party(most of it), Richie had no other friends in Hawkins.

They were all huddled around Dustin's ghostbox, waiting for him to show them what was inside. He'd been talking to them about it the whole time they walked to the room, and seemed so excited that Ross was surprised he hadn't just busted it out in the middle of the hall. But he's restrained, and had even sat the box on the table and told them how crazy and awesome it was for at least five minutes, until Lucas told him to spit it out. Finally, he clicked it open.

They all leaned in, listening to the chitters of the slimy, slug-like creature that was inside.

"What the fuck is that?" Richie asked, adjusting his glasses.

"His name is d'Artagnan," Dustin told them all, a childlike giddiness on his features. Ross screwed up her face as he reached inside the box.

"Oh god," she muttered in disgust.

"Cute, right?" he asked.

"D'Artagnan?" Mike asked incredulously.

"Dart for short," Dustin corrected.

"And he was in your trash?" Max asked, looking slightly disgusted. That was one thing her and Ross could agree on. It looked like an

over-glorified slug. Why did he keep it?

Being friends with all boys for most of her childhood would perhaps make people think that Ross loved bugs and critters. But it was quite the opposite. She hated beetles and bugs, not to the point where she was screaming if she saw one, but to the point where she refused to touch any of them. The only bug that *really* scared her, were spiders. She probably considered the monster her greatest fear, if asked. *(Nothing should have that many legs!)*

"Foraging for food," Dustin explained. He glanced at Dart, then back up at Max. "You wanna hold him?"

Max shook her head. "No. No."

Dustin persisted, already holding the creature out to her," he doesn't bite."

"I don't want to-" Dustin dropped it in her hands.

"Oh. God, he's slimy!" she exclaimed, turning and dumping it into Lucas's hands.

"Ugh, he's like a living booger," Lucas said in disgust, quickly passing it to Richie.

Ross watched as the boy shuddered, and he turned towards her. "That fuckers the living embodiment of gray water."

"Don't give it to me!" she exclaimed, grabbing his wrists and pulling them across the table to Will.

"Ugh, oh, God!" Will said, repulsed. He passed it off to Mike, who instead of exclaiming his disgust, held it up and got a closer look at it. Ross shook her head, screwing up her face.

"What is he?" he asked, looking at it as if it would answer him itself.

"My question exactly," Dustin smiled.

He dropped some books on the table. "At first, I thought it was some sort of pollywog."

"Pollywhat?" Richie asked.

"Pollywog," Dustin said. "It's another word for tadpole. A tadpole is the larval stage of a toad."

"We know what a tadpole is," Max said.

"All right, then you know that most tadpoles are aquatic, right?" He flipped to a page in the first book that he had marked. "Well, Dart, he isn't. He doesn't need water."

"Yeah, but aren't there nonaquatic pollywogs?" Lucas asked. Ross raised her eyebrows. *Nonaquatic tadpoles?*

"Terrestrial pollywogs?" Dustin asked. "Yep. Two to be exact.

"*Indirana semiplamata,"* Dustin said. He flipped to another page. "And the *Adenomera andreae."*

"Fancy," Ross muttered, leaning in to get a look at the big words.

"One's from India, one's from South America," Dustin told them. "So how did one end up in my trash?"

"Maybe some scientists brought it here and it escaped?" Max asked.

"It got lost on it's way home?" Ross joked.

"Do you guys see that?" Mike suddenly asked.

Ross glanced at him, then down at Dart. The thing as writhering slightly, his sides looking like something was inside trying to reach out.

"Looks like something is moving inside of it."

"That's fucking disgusting," Richie muttered. Mike reached over and moved the lamp over it. Dart looked up and screeched. They all jumped.

Dart climbed over the cords they had placed around it as a barrier, and headed towards the edge of the table. Dustin, reached over and

caught it just as it leapt off. "Whoa. It's okay, it's okay. I got you, little guy."

Dart chittered, and Dustin responded as if it was actually talking to him. "I know you don't like that, it's okay."

Dustin looked up at them," And there's another thing. Reptiles, they're cold-blooded. Ectothermic, right?"

"I don't know what that means," Ross said honestly.

"Basically another word for cold-blooded," Lucas told her.

"They love heat, the sun," Dustin continued. "Dart hates it. It hurts him."

"So, if he's not a pollywog or a reptile," Lucas started."

"Then I've discovered a new species," Dustin, finished.

"In your trashcan," Richie added.

Dustin ran his finger over Dart's back, and the creature chittered.

The bell rang. They all jumped and hurried to gather their things for the next class. As they exited the AV room, Lucas said," We gotta show him to Mr. Clarke."

"No," Dustin peotested. "What if he steals my discover?"

"He's not gonna steal your discovery," Mike said.

"You know, I'm thinking about calling it *Dustinious pollywogus,"* Dustin said.

"Because that's not vain at all," Ross said.

"What do you think?" Dustin asked, turning to Max.

"I think you're an idiot."

They kept walking, but Ross rolled to a stop when she noticed Will lagging behind.

"Will. Hey, you okay?" Ross asked, laying a hand on his shoulder. He jumped slightly, like he hadn't noticed her.

"What? Yeah, I'm fine," he said. She gave him a suspicious look.

"You can talk to me, Will," she whispered. "But if everything's fine..."

"It is," he nodded, smiling at her. "I promise." *He's lying.*

"C'mon. Let's catch up with the others," he said, nodding in the direction they had gone.

Ross was at her locker, packing her things away when Richie approached, telling her that they were going to Mr. Clarke's room to show him Dart.

"That thing is disgusting," Ross said on their way there, gripping the straps of her bag. "Then again I'm not surprised Dustin decided to keep it as a pet. It just gives me a bad feeling."

"Shoulda held it," Richie told her. "Then it woulda given you another bad feeling." She scrunched up her face.

"Yeah, you called it the living embodiment of gray water," she said. "What is gray water, anyway?"

"Piss and shit," he said casually. "Eddie decided to tell me it one time when we were in the sewers."

"Why were you in the sewers?" Ross questioned, furrowing her eyebrows. "I mean, i'm not surprised *you* were in the sewers, you smell like it all the time."

Richie laughed. "Thanks, Ross. You smell like my dad after eating chinese," he bit back, grinning widely. He didn't answer her question, however.

Maybe it was personal? But what could be personal about splashing around in the sewers? Ross decided to leave it be as they walked into Clarke's room. Dustin, Lucas, and Max were already inside, talking to Clarke. They had almost reached the desk when the door came flying

open behind them and Mike and Will ran in.

"Stop!" Mike shouted, shoving past Richie and Ross. He dashed towards the desk and grabbed Dustin's ghost box. "I'm really sorry, Mr. Clarke. It was just a stupid prank."

"What the hell are you doing?" Dustin asked.

"I told him to stop," Mike said. He began backing up, shaking his finger at the others as he bumped into Ross. "We need to go. Right now."

He grabbed Ross's wrist and began dragging her along with him. "Mike!" Dustin shouted.

"Right now!" Mike yelled, yanking at Ross's arm and pulling her out the door behind him.

"Mike, what's happening?" Ross asked as he ran down the hall with her in tow, the others not far behind. "What happened?"

They made it to the AV club room, and Mike promptly shoved Ross through the door, then pulled Will, Dustin, and Lucas in after her. He shut the door in Max and Richie's faces.

"Guys, come on," Max yelled from the other side of the door. "Can wecome in yet?"

"No!" Mike shouted at her, rolling her eyes.

"I don't understand," Lucas said, pacing back and forth.

"What do you not understand?" Mike asked, leaning forward on the table. They were all gathered around Dart's container again, discussing the knowledge Mike and Will had just shared with them.

"Will saw something that looked like Dart last year?" Lucas asked.

"Kind of," Will said quietly. "But there was no tail."

"Why didn't you tell any of us?" Ross asked him.

"I didn't want anyone to worry."

Ross sighed, putting her head in her hands.

"But then he heard it yesterday," Mike added. "The exact same sound."

"Why didn't you tell us before?" Dustin asked, sounding slightly irritated.

"I wasn't sure," Will explained.

"So it's a coincidence," Dustin claimed.

"Or not," Mike said. "What if when Will was stuck in the Upside Down, he somehow acquired True Sight?"

Ross furrowed her eyebrows.

"True Sight?" Lucas asked.

"It gives you the power to see into the ethereal plane," Dustin muttered.

Lucas sighed, shaking his head. "Elaborate."

"Maybe these episodes that Will keeps having aren't really flashbacks at all," Mike said, glancing at Will. "Maybe they're real. Maybe Will can somehow see into the Upside Down."

"So that would mean?" Lucas asked.

"Dart is from the Upside Down," Mike said.

"Okay, wait," Ross said. "How would being in the Upside Down give him True Sight? I was in the Upside Down, and I'm fine. And Hopper and Will's mom both went in to get him, and they're both fine."

"Maybe it's because he was in there longer," Dustin proposed.

"And that's not entirely true," Mike said, looking at Ross. "You got that nosebleed yesterday."

"Mike, it was a *nosebleed,"* Ross said. "I've had them before."

"Yeah, when you've been hit in the face," Mike said. She remembered the time they were having a pillow fight, and Dustin had hit her with the pillow so hard her nose bled. "This was different. And *she* got nosebleeds."

Yes, *she* got nosebleeds. But Ross was not Eleven.

"Your nose started bleeding?" Lucas asked.

"Not important," Ross said quickly. "Not related."

"Anyway," Dustin said, drawing them back on track.

"We have to take him to Hopper," Lucas said.

"I agree," Mike said.

"No," Dustin said shaking his head. "If we take him to Hopper, Dart's as good as dead."

"Maybe he should be," Mike said.

"How can you say that?" Dustin exclaimed.

"How can you not?" Mike said, voice raising a bit. "He's from the Upside Down!"

"Maybe," Dustin stressed. "But even if he is, it doesn't automatically mean he's bad."

"That's like saying just because someone's from the Death Star doesn't make them bad," Mike said. Ross groaned.

"We have a bond," Dustin told them.

"A bond?" Mike asked. "Just because he likes nougat?" Ross had to admit, the thought was ridiculous. Dustin had found the thing in his trash, and had kept it for a night.

"No, because he trusts me!" Dustin said loudly.

"He trusts you?" Lucas asked incredulously.

"Yes, I promised I would take care of him," Dustin said. Ross scoffed.

"It looks like a giant ass *slug with legs,"* Ross exclaimed. "You found it in your *trashcan.* Dustin are you hearing yourself?"

Suddenly, Dart started screeching, rattling his box. They all took a step back as it rattled to the point it moved a couple inches. "What's it doing?" Ross asked.

Outside the door, Max pounded on it again. "Guys, what's going on? Come on." Ross didn't hear Richie. Maybe he'd left?

Dart's box kept shaking, and it flipped on it's side. Mike reached over and grabbed the mic for their AV set.

"Don't hurt him," Dustin said.

"Only if he attacks."

"Just open it already," Lucas exclaimed. Dustin reached for the switch, holding it in his hand. He pressed the button. Dart tumbled out the side. He had grown.

"Holy shit!" Lucas exclaimed. It rolled onto it's feet and walked forward, and Ross took a few steps back. What was it doing? It screeched, and for a second Ross thought it was in pain. Then it sprouted legs.

"What the fuck!" she yelled.

Lucas shouted again and Mike raised his makeshift weapon, bringing it down upon Dart. "No!" Dustin shouted, lunging forward and shoving Mike's hand to the side. He missed and Dart scampered off the table in Ross's direction. It landed at her feet, and in a split second desicion, she kicked it away from her. It hit a desk and fell to the ground, quickly getting back go it's feet and scampering towards the door just as it swung open.

Max was knelt in front of it, Richie right behind her, and they both watched as Dart scurried by.

"Oh, shit," Mike exclaimed. They all headed towards the door, desperate to catch it before anyone else saw it. Dustin practically tackled Max to the floor, and Lucas tripped over them.

"Where'd he go?" Lucas yelled, climbing to his feet.

"What the fuck happened," Richie asked, stepping over Max and Dustin to look down the hall.

"What was that?" Max asked, getting up as well.

"Dart!" Mike exclaimed.

"What?"

"You let him escape!"

"Why did you attack him?" Dustin shouted, poking Mike in the chest. He turned to glare at Ross. "Why did you kick him?"

"Come on," Mike said, shoving past Dustin.

"Don't hurt him," Dustin shouted after him. "Don't you hurt him!"

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, plot, or characters of Stranger Things or IT

JustCrazy: Thanks for reviewing! Ross's 'problem' will definitely have more questions and theories from the Party in upcoming chapters. And as for your opinion on Ross and Richie, I'm very glad to hear what you think of it, or any other ships in the fanfic for that matter. I am planning on Ross having a love interest, but it will most likely be slow burn, and won't escalate too quickly.

candy95: Thank you for reviewing, and I'm glad you enjoyed the chapter! The reason I did not send Ross back with Mike and Will (even though it was heavily considered) was because in the episode Mike is upset over Max being there and 'intruding' on their small group, and in this chapter Richie is no exception. I feel like if Ross had left with Mike, it would have taken away or

ignored the fact that he also thinks Ross is 'replacing' Eleven with Richie. But, like I said, I did mull over the thought of sending Ross with them quite a bit. Not sending her with them also allowed me to let Richie and Ross to talk more, and give Ross more of an idea over what Richie had gone through that last year.

A/N: Finally, the chapter where things really start to kick off. Regarding the whole story, I plan on having 14 or 15 chapters depending on how things go. I've already got the next three done, just have to attempt to proofread them and make changes. And again, if you have any suggestions let me know! I'm open to them all. Sorry for any grammatical errors. Very much hope you enjoy the chapter!

- blockthewriter

6. Chapter 6

"West is clear, too. Will?" Dustin asked over the walkie talkie.

"South is clear. Lucas? Anything?"

"*Nothing here, man*," Lucas came through. *"Ross?"*

"No," she responded, holding the radio to her mouth as she turned out of an empty classroom. "Nothing. Mike?"

She started down the hall, making her way to the gym. It was the one place she hadn't checked yet. Maybe Dart was in there?

Suddenly, a door she'd been walking past swung open, and she jumped. Turning to face the door, she prepared herself to catch Dart, but lowered her arms when she saw who it was.

"Calm down," Richie said, holding his hands up. "Just me. Don't shit your pants."

Ross sighed. "Seen it?"

"Dart? No," Richie said, shaking his head. "But I did find the sex ed classroom. You won't believe what kinda posters they have on the walls!"

She rolled her eyes. "Not now. C'mon, let's check the gym."

She began to walk down the hall, but Richie grabbed her elbow. "Wait. What the hell happened in that room?"

Ross raised her eyebrows. "Dart got bigger," she answered. "Sprouted legs. Now we gotta find him." She went to go again, but he held his grip.

"No," Richie said, shaking his head. His glasses only made his prying eyes larger. "Before. What were you guys talking about? I could hear you through that door, I'm not a dipshit. What the fuck is an upside down?"

Panic rose is Ross's chest.

"Nothing," she said, shaking her head.

"Ross, you told me I could talk to you," Richie reminded her. "How am I supposed to do that if you can't talk to me."

She sighed deeply, slumping her shoulders.

"Richie, I-"

They heard a door close.

Ross turned towards the end of the hall, and saw a flash of curly, dark brown hair disappear around the corner. Her heart skipped a beat. None of them had hair like that.

She'd always wonder what Eleven's hair would look like if it'd grown out.

In a second she was at the end of the hall, turning left and bursting through the doors to the next hall. Richie was calling her name behind her. Was it true? Was Eleven really here?

She glanced down either end of the hall, and disappointment filled her. It was empty.

Ross suddenly felt stupid. Why would El be here? Why had she thought Eleven was in the school? That could have been anyone. Maybe she'd just been worked up. After all, Richie had been asking her about what they were talking about, and Eleven had a lot to do with it. She had just hoped-

"Ross?" the doors opened behind her and Richie was squinting at her through his glasses. "What was that?"

She shook her head. "Just thought I saw Dart," she mumbled.

"Guys," came Will's voice over her walkie talkie. *"I found him."*

Ross fumbled to flip the switch, bringing the radio to her mouth. "Where are you?"

"Where?" Dustin asked.

"In the bathroom," Will said. It sounded like he was whispering. *"By Mr. Salerno's."*

"Copy that," Mike's voice came through.

Ross glanced at Richie and nodded back towards the doors. "C'mon, that's not far."

They made their way to the bathroom Will'd been talking about, and Richie didn't say anything. Ross had really doubted he'd forgotten. He'd probably pester her about it later. Would she tell him? She wasn't sure.

"Ross!"

Mike was at the corner with Max, just turning to meet them. She was a bit suspicious as to why he was with the new girl. Didn't Mike not like her?

Lucas came through a door, looking like he'd ran the whole way.

"Let's go," Mike said, breaking in a run towards the bathroom. "Down here!"

"We're coming," Lucas called out, maybe to Will. They all followed Mike and entered the boys' bathroom. Dustin was already inside.

*"*Where's Dart?" Mike asked.

"Where's Will?" Ross asked, noticing the boy's absence. Hadn't he said he'd been here?

"I don't know," Dustin said. "Not here."

"What?" Mike asked, pushing open the stall door next to him.

"He said by Salerno's, right?" Max asked. Ross stared at Dustin. He was lying.

"Yeah, maybe Will has him."

She averted her eyes to Dustin's feet, where a walkie talkie lay abandoned on the floor. She walked forward and knelt next to it.

"It's his walkie-talkie," she said, picking it up and rising to her full height. She faced Dustin.

"Where *is* Will?" Mike asked, coming to stand by her. He was gone.

Ross, Lucas, and Mike found him in the field. He was standing straight, eyes closed, doing nothing. They sent Lucas in to get the others.

"What's wrong with him?" Ross asked. Mike had a hand on his shoulder, shaking him slightly. She was scared to touch him. Was he okay? She had both hers and his walkie talkies in her arms.

"I don't know," Mike said. He shook him some more. "Will."

Ross heard footsteps and turned towards the school. "It's Will's mom."

Dustin, Lucas, Max, Richie, and Ms. Byers were sprinting towards them, panicked. "I just found him like this!" Mike exclaimed. "I think he's having another episode!"

Ross looked at Will. Could he be? Usually Will was more...awake. He would move, talk. This? This was different. He was like a statue.

"Will!" Joyce exclaimed as she slowed to a stop in front of her son. She grabbed both his shoulders, eyes concerned. "Will! Will!"

Ross took a small step back. This wasn't good.

"Sweetie, wake up," Joyce pleaded. "It's mom! Will!"

Ross's head began to hurt. Was Will gonna be okay? This wasn't a normal episode. It wasn't just a flashback. It couldn't be.

"Will, wake up! Can you hear me?" Joyce's hands moved to Will's head, hoping to bring him back. "Will, please, just wake up. Please, wake up!

"It's mom!"

Suddenly, a shooting pain shot right behind Ross's eyes. She brought a hand to her head, taking another small step back.

"It's me!"

Will's eyes snapped open, and he gasped as if he hadn't been breathing.

Ross doubled over, dropped the walkie talkies, and cried out as the pain deepened. "Fuck!"

Two people reached out to her at once. Lucas grabbed her arm, calling her name. Mike was on her other side, laying a hand on her shoulder and kneeling down beside her.

"Ross! What's wrong?"

"My head!" she exclaimed. She looked up to meet his eyes, and the brown orbs widened.

"Your nose!"

She felt something liquid on her lips. She stuck her tongue out, and immediately brought her hands to her mouth as she recognized the metallic taste.

Ross stood, blood dribbling out of her nose, down her face, and off her chin. She cupped her hands underneath the blood, trying to catch it.

"Holy shit!" Richie and Dustin both exclaimed.

"C'mon," Joyce said, wrapping her arm around a dazed looking Will. "Let's get them both inside."

"Okay, that totally freaked me out."

They stood on the front steps of the school, watching Will leave with his mother.

Ross's nose had stopped bleeding, but her headache had not ceased. She'd washed off most of the blood in the bathroom sink, but there were still drops on her shirt, and her hands and part of her face were stained with faded red.

"Did that not freak you guys out?" Max asked, glancing over at them. Ross rolled her eyes.

"That was so fucked up," Richie said from beside Ross.

"Two episodes in two days," Lucas muttered.

"It's getting worse," Mike said. Lucas sighed, looking to his friend.

"You think it's true sight?"

"What's true sight?" Max asked.

Mike looked back at Lucas, Dustin, and Ross, shaking his head slightly.

"It's nothing," Lucas said.

Ross felt Richie's eyes bore into her head. She looked down into her blood stained hands. She'd have to tell him now. There was no way she couldn't.

When Ross got home that night her father wasn't. The house was empty, the car gone, and Ross dumped her bike on the front lawn. She rushed inside, kicking off her shoes and going up the steps two at a time, heading for her room. Her bag was dropped on the floor, and she threw herself on her bed, staring up at the ceiling.

A week ago.

A week ago everything had been normal. Not perfect, but normal. Will's episodes hadn't been acting out. Max hadn't started school yet. Richie hadn't started school yet. Ross wasn't having nosebleeds. Dustin hadn't found Dart. Their party was fine and happy, not having to worry about newcomers or over their friends' health. Now Will was out of it, possibly hurt, and Ross was having crazy nosebleeds

and pounding headaches.

She still had one, even now.

She wished everything would go back to the way it was. Will was fine. No Max. No Dart. No Richie.

Ross liked Richie, she really did. He had a sense of humor, inappropriate sometimes(most times), but he was nice, too, and understanding to a point. He'd been through shit. Ross could tell. But the thought of telling him everything weighed on her conscious. Maybe she shouldn't.

You have to.

She'd told him he could talk to her. It was only fair she talk to him.

Then why didn't she want to tell Max? Sure, she didn't know Max that well, but she didn't know Richie very well, either. *Did Richie try to run you over?* No. *Did Richie ruin Halloween? Did he create a rift between the party?* No. At least, not as much as Max had.

It was different. Max was a girl, and so was Eleven. You can replace a girl with a girl. Richie was a boy. He was an entirely different player. She wasn't aiming to replace Eleven with him. It wouldn't even work. The only thing they had in common was brown eyes and their stubbornness. Eleven was so stubborn. She missed it.

Ross sighed, and rolled over so she could see her bag on the floor. She slipped off her bed and sat on the wooden floor, pulling her walkie talkie from her bag. She stared at it for a bit.

Should she try? Would it work? Probably not. *Mike's been trying for the past year. If it hasn't worked for him why would it work for you?*

She turned it on anyway.

Ross switched channels to the one Mike was always on when he called Eleven. It was full of empty static and false hope. She pushed a button down on the side.

"El?"

Nothing.

"Eleven? It's Ross," she spoke into it. "Roslyn King."

More silence. She wasn't going to say anything. She probably wasn't even there. But if she was?

"I don't know if you're there," Ross said, leaning back agaisnt the foot of her bed. "And if you are you probably can't say anything. But...you can listen.

"I miss you. I miss you like the world. And yet I only knew you for a few days," Ross gave a small laugh, one with not much joy. "It's bad without you. I wish you were here. Everything sucks. Everything's going to shit.

"Will's episodes are acting up. The boys think he's had two episodes in the last two days, but I think he's had three in the last three days. At the arcade. He wasn't all...there. I think something was wrong. I'm getting these crazy nosebleeds and headaches. Dustin found some thing, and we think it's from the Upside Down. And...it all started when Max came to school," Ross found herself saying. "Max and Richie. Max is...I don't like her. She nearly hit us with her god damned car. She's pulling Dustin and Lucas away from the rest of us. I...I feel like she's replacing you. That Lucas and Dustin are...

"Mike thinks it, too. But not just about Dustin and Lucas. He thinks I'm trying to replace you, too," Ross said bitterly. "With Richie. But I'm not. I couldn't.

"Because I miss you, and I love you, and no one could ever replace you. You were special. You are special," she said. She was crying now, softly, trying to keep it in. "But Richie...he's different. He looks exactly like Mike, it's creepy. But he's nothing like him. His hair is curlier, and he's got these big glasses that make his eyes look gigantic. And he's funny. He makes a lot of sex jokes, and it's disgusting, but he's nice. He's understanding. I can't...I can't help but want to tell him everything.

"I want to tell him about you, but...I can't. I know I can't," Ross confessed, sighing deeply. She wiped at her face, trying to brush

away the tears. "You're too important, too special. And Mike would be mad. He won't let Lucas and Dustin tell Max. I don't want them to, either. But Richie is different. I don't know how, but he is. And there's also the chance he won't believe me. But after everything that's happened today, he just might. What do I do?"

Ross waited for a response, not surprise when nothing but static reached her ears.

"I need your help, El," Ross sobbed, pressing the edge of the walkie talkie to her forehead. "I don't know what to do and I need you. Please say something. Please come back. Please come *home*."

Nothing.

The static was annoying.

Ross switched off the button and laid it on the floor beside her. If El said anything, she would hear. She doubted anything would come through, but yet she still laid herself down on the floor next to it. Her headache was gone now. And she was tired. She wiped the tears from her eyes and rolled onto her side. The floor was cold, but she couldn't bring herself to get up and grab a blanket.

Ross fell asleep that night on the cold floor, wondering if El was on the other side of the walkie talkie, dying to talk to her but knowing she couldn't. However, it wasn't El on the other side. It was Mike, sitting in his basment, crying inside Eleven's fort. He fell asleep that night within it, thinking of what Ross had said, and wondering if El had heard it too.

Ross woke up in the morning to her dad knocking on her door.

"Ross! You up?" he yelled through the door. She groaned, sitting up.

"Now I am," she replied, opening her eyes. Her door swung open and her dad stood in the doorway. His eyes landed on her.

"Why are you on the floor?"

She glanced around, shrugging.

"What's all over your face? And your hands?"

"Oh. That's dried blood," she said, getting to her feet. "I had a bloody nose yesterday. Didn't clean it good enough."

"Someone hit you?"

Ross sighed, turning and grabbing a sweatshirt from her dresser. "No, dad. No one hit me."

"You haven't had a bloody nose since you were little," he noted. When she turned back to him he was leaning on the frame. Making himself comfortable.

"Not since before mom left," Ross said. "How was the bar last night?"

David sighed, looking at the floor.

"That ain't fair, Ross," he said. She rolled her eyes. It was perfectly fair.

"Why not?" she asked. "You went. Why can't I ask about it?"

"You know that's not what I meant," he said sternly. She clenched her fist.

"Then what did you mean, dad?" she asked sharply. "We don't talk often enough for me to tell what you mean and what you don't mean." She slipped the sweatshirt on over her head and pushed past him out the doorway, grabbing her bookbag on the way.

"I'm trying," her dad said as she walked down the hall. His footsteps followed her. "I'm trying. Why can't you accept that? Why can't you appreciate it?"

"I'll appreciate it when you try harder," she snapped. "I don't know why you would. You didn't try with mom, why would you try with me?"

He let out an irritated groan. "You're *my* child. Quit talking to me like I'm not your father." She went down the stairs and he was right behind her. The kitchen was her next destination. She pulled on an

old pair of tennis shoes, and then approached the fridge.

"Where's my money, dad?" she asked, peering inside the refrigerator. "The parents are supposed to pay the bills, not the kids." She stood straight and looked at him, cocking an eyebrow.

"Or was it for booze?"

"You want money?" her dad exclaimed. He reached into his pocket and opened his wallet, pulling out a twenty. Slamming it on the table angrily he said," there! Maybe I can buy your damned respect!"

Ross slammed the fridge door shut. "Why don't you try earning it! Huh? Why don't you do something that shows you care!"

"I care!" he argued. "If I didn't you wouldn't have a home! You'd be holed up in some shitty orphanage, parentless for the rest of your life because you're too much of a problem for anyone else to handle!"

"Maybe it would be for the better!" Ross said, slamming her fist on the counter.

"You wanna go to foster care?" her dad roared. "Be my guest! But let me tell you they won't give a rats ass about what you want! They're mean, and they don't care about you, just about where their gonna put you and the money their gonna get for it! I've been there, Ross, I know what it's like! I'm giving you a life here! I'm helping you!"

Ross stomped her foot, glaring hard. "Helping isn't enough! I want a dad! I want someone who cares for me! Someone who loves me!" Her words echoed through the house. Her dad stood on the otherside of the counter, breathing hard.

"You want someone who loves you," he repeated. "You don't think you can get that from me? What? Do you think you could get it from your mom?"

Ross didn't answer. She clenched her fists, biting her tongue. She would not cry.

"You're mother *left,"* her dad stressed, quieter than before, almost a whisper. "She's gone, she left. If she loved you, she would have taken

you with her. She didn't love you!"

"That's not true!" Ross cried out. "You're lying!"

"*I* love you, Ross. Me. Your dad," he said. It looked like he was about to cry, too. "You may think I don't, but I do."

"But you love them more," Ross exclaimed. "Joyce! Will! Jonathan! You may love me, but you want them!"

Her dad was quiet, staring at her. She scoffed, shaking her head.

Ross left the kitchen, running for the front door. Her dad followed, calling for her to stop. She didn't. She left the house, jumping the steps of the front porch and to her bike.

Swinging her leg over it, she ignored her dad as he yelled at her. She left.

He wouldn't come after her. He never did. He didn't chase after her mom, he wouldn't chase after her. At least, not at first. He would maybe drive into town later, checking at her friends' houses. But until then she had left, and she wasn't going back.

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, plot, or character of Stranger Things or IT

Just Crazy: Again, thanks for the lovely review! I love you're interest in Ross's 'problem', and I'd like to hear some of your theories, or where you'd like her 'problem' to go.

candy95: Thanks for reviewing again, I love getting input. I'm happy to hear that you agree with how I handled the Halloween situation(would you call it that? Idk). And as for Ross's involvement, I'm trying to keep her as involved as I can without making her seemed *too* involved. Most of this story will be told from Ross's point of view, so it will really only be focusing on the scenes or situations she's in. However, if you would like to see different POVs or thoughts from other characters, just let me know and I'll see what I can do to make if fit if it can.

A/N: Chapter 6 is up! I might *might* post Chapter 7 early, just because I'm on Spring Break with a bunch of spare time on my hands. However, don't hold your breath, because I want to space how I upload chapters so you guys won't have too much of a content-less gap between when this story finishes and when S3 comes out. I'm thinking of other stories I might do after this one is finished too give you guys something to chew on between then and S3. Anyway, in this chapter we get more insight on Ross's relationship with her dad! What do you guys think of it, and/or her dad? Also, what are your guys's favorite parts of the chapter? I'd love to know your input. Anyway, I'm sorry for any grammatical errors, and I hope you'll learn to forgive. If not, that's fine, too. Just hope it won't stop you from enjoying this chapter!

- blockthewriter

7. Chapter 7

Ross went to Mike's house. She always went there after fleeing from a fight with her dad. She knocked on the door, relieved when Mike was the one to answer. He didn't ask any questions, just opened the door a little wider for her to get through and dash to the basement.

After a few minutes he bounded down the stairs to find her sorting through a bag of clothes she had stashed in the corner.

"Ross?" he asked. "You okay?"

She nodded, pulling out a fresh pair of jeans and a shirt. "Fine. Me and my dad had an arguement." He nodded, standing there awkwardly for a moment before sitting down on the couch.

"You've still got the blood," he said. Ross glanced down at her hands. He was right.

"I-I haven't washed it off," she explained. "Last night when I got home I was so tired I went straight to bed." Mike hummed, nodding slightly. The way he was looking at her freaked her out. It was like he didn't know what to think, or what to say, like he was thinking about something else, like she was just an old memory and he didn't know what to think about it. She stood, gesturing to the bathroom.

"I'm going to change and wash this shit off my face," she told him. He nodded, and she turned to go.

"Ross?"

"Yeah, Mike?" she asked, glancing back at him. He was staring at her, brown eyes wide.

"I saw something yesterday," he said breathlessly. "I saw someone at the school." Ross turned around all the way, furrowing her eyebrows.

"Someone or something?" she asked. He'd said both, but which did he mean? She saw his hesitation to answer, the way he averted his eyes, first to the table, then to something behind her. She looked behind her, and her breath caught in her throat. El's fort.

Turning back, she asked him," It was someone, wasn't it?"

He looked at her, and his eyes said it all. But rather than voicing the words, he shook his head. "I mean...nevermind. It was stupid." He turned to go, but Ross stopped him.

"I saw her, too," she said quickly. He froze in his spot. "I think. I think I saw her, I don't know but-"

"Where?" he asked, turning back to her. He took quick steps towards her, and grabbed her arms, expression hopeful yet crushed all at the same time. "Where did you see her, Ross?"

"Near the gym," she answered. "But I don't know. I only-I only saw her hair, Mike, I don't know if it was her."

"It could have been anyone," he muttered, looking away, coming to the conclusion Ross had yesterday. He shook his head and dropped his hands. "We probably shouldn't get our hopes up."

"Doesn't mean we can't stop hoping," Ross said, watching as his head perked up towards her. "I miss her, too, Mike."

He didn't say anything to that, just stared at her, with that look that said he wasn't really looking at you, just thinking about you really hard.

"I do, too," he finally said. It looked like he was about to say something else, maybe ask another question, but was biting his tongue.

"I...I'll be upstairs. Waiting," he said. She nodded. That wasn't what he had intended on saying, she knew that. But she let it slide.

In the end Ross had been able to get the rest of the blood off her face, but her fingertips were left with a red tint. Her and Mike left for school not ten minutes after she'd gotten done. They rode their bikes, as always, and the chilly wind bit through Ross's jacket.

"Stop being a baby and do it already!" Mike exclaimed, tapping his stick on the ground.

"This is so disgusting," Max complained. "Is this really necessary?"

"Ross, what the *fuck* are you doing?" Richie asked, the upper half of his body leaned inside the trash can. Ross had a hold of his feet, and was attempting to push them up so Richie would fall all the way in.

"Trying to put you where you belong!" she exclaimed, giving one last final push. He slipped over the edge, and she heard a satisfying *crunch* as he landed on the trash.

"Ow! Ross watch where your throwing him," Lucas exclaimed from inside. Apparently he hadn't just landed on trash.

A slew of curses escaped Richie's mouth, and he poked his head up over the edge. Before he could say anything though, Dustin came around the corner.

"What the hell's going on?" he asked, looking at all of them. Ross was leaning agaisnt the side of the dumpster, and Max and Mike were only a few feet away, holding wooden rods.

"What do you think?" Mike asked. "We're looking for Dart."

Suddenly, a trash bag went flying over Richie's head and landed at Ross's feet.

"Jesus!" Dustin exclaimed, backing up as another trash bag followed.

"Oh my god," Ross said, putting a hand over her nose. It smelled utterly horrible. She began to feel a bit bad about making Lucas and Richie go dumpster diving.

Lucas jumped the edge of the dumpster, landing between Ross and Max. Richie climbed up over the edge, but sat on it instead of dropping down. "Well, well, well," Lucas said. "Look who finally decided to show up."

"Yeah," Richie said. "After *we* drew the fucking short straw."

"Real convenient," Lucas continued. Max scrunched up her nose and moved over next to Dustin.

"You stink," she told him.

"Yeah, he smells like Ross," Richie said. Ross turned and hit his foot, only drawing a laugh from Richie's lips.

"I will put your ass back in there, Tozier," she threatened.

"Hi, Max," Dustin said, smiling at the blue-eyed girl.

"Hi," Max said warily. Ross glanced between the two, raising an eyebrow. That was awkward.

"Where's Will?" Dustin asked, turning back to Mike. The boy shifted on his feet, keeping hold of the stick with both hands.

"He'll be here."

"Are you just gonna stand there?" Lucas asked, grabbing another stick and tossing it to Dustin. "Or are you gonna help?"

Dustin, along with Mike and Max, stepped forward to poke at the trash bags. Lucas kicked it.

Still on the dumpster, Richie gave a laugh," Oh my god. Eddie would be having an aneurysm right now." Ross looked up at him, remembering when he told her about his friends. Eddie was the germaphobe, a complete clean freak.

"Who's Eddie?" Max asked, glancing up at Richie. The Tozier boy cocked his head, staring at her carefully.

"One of my friends back in Derry," he finally said, dropping down next to Ross. "Eddie Kaspbrak."

"You had friends?" Dustin asked, pausing to take a look at him. Richie put his hands on his hips, nodding.

"More than you have now," he informed them. Then he looked at Ross and Max. "Even had our own red head. But her hair was short."

Ross and Max exchanged glances. Their hair was pretty similar. Max's was long and slightly wavy, and was a beautiful reddish orange.

Ross's was long as well, but with wild curls and stronger orange tones. One of Richie's friends was a redhead? Now that he thought about it, she did remember him mentioning her, called her a total babe. However, he'd only went into detail about three. Bill, Eddie, and Stan.

Looking at the new boy again, she gave him a quizzical look. Would he ever tell her about his other friends? Then she remembered he was waiting on her to tell him about Will. It was only understandable he wouldn't tell her anything until she returned the favor.

"All living things, from complex mammals to single-celled organisms, instinctively respond to danger," Mr. Clarke told the class. "Expose a bacterium to a toxic chemical and it will flee. Or deploy some other defense mechanism. We're very much the same."

Ross looked back at the empty seat in front of her. Will was gone, again. His episode was worse than they had thought. Was he sick now? Hurt? Something inside her asked if he'd gone missing again. However, she knew it wasn't true. She would know if he was missing.

"When we encounter danger, our hearts start pounding."

She thought back to when *she* had gone into the upside down. She'd only been inside for a night, and unlike Will, she'd been the one to get herself out. The images still haunted her mind, though. Vines had been everywhere. Her house, which had been old, but together, was broken. A section of the roof had caved in. Furniture was broken in half. A tree grew in the foyer. She had heard something. In the basement.

"Our palms start to sweat."

It was the second time she'd been in the basement. It was colder than before, and darker. She nearly tripped over the vines that grew along the walls and over the ground. It's when she saw it. It wasn't the demogorgon, nor was it whatever Dart was. It was a person, or it looked like one. It had jumped down the well so fast she wasn't even sure she saw it. But she did remember the frightening blue eyes, and the face so white it looked like it'd been painted that way.

"These are the signs of the physical and emotional state we call...fear."

Ross's head hurt.

She lifted a hand to her nose, and raised her hand.

"Yes, Ross?"

"Can I go to the bathroom, Mr. Clarke?" she asked, standing from her desk. Her teacher looked concerned, peering at her with furrowed eyebrows.

"Of course," he nodded. "Is something wrong?" Ross pulled her hand from her face and heard some of her classmates gasp.

"Just a bloody nose," she said easily, hiding her panic. Mr. Clarke frowned, but nodded. She walked up the row, ignoring the prying eyes burning into the back of her head.

"If it doesn't stop, make sure you go to the nurse," he reminded her as she left. Ross nodded, closing the door behind her.

She broke into a run for the nearest bathroom.

She stood at the sink, staring at the mirror. Her face was red, but not because of the blood. She'd just scrubbed it too hard, too much. She ran her fingertips lightly over her mouth, furrowing her eyebrows.

That'd been her third nosebleed in the past three days. What was her deal? Why was she suddenly having nosebleed? What caused them?

When Ross was younger, she always got nosebleeds. During recess, during class, at home. She could get a nosebleed doing just about anything. However, she got them the most when she'd been hit. Once, in grade school, Troy Harrington had punched her in the face. She couldn't remember why, but she did remember the teacher monitoring their recess throw the biggest fit Ross had ever seen. She raved and yelled about how you don't hit girls, and dragged Harrington to the principal's as she did. But she forgot Ross, and didn't even know that she'd gotten a bloody nose so feirce that the

blood would stain her face for the next three days to come. Mike had been the one to help her off the ground and bring her to the nurses, holding the sleeve of his shirt to her nose the whole way.

She was also more likely to get a nosebleed when she got too excited. She was a fidgety kid, always moving or talking, with the attention span of nothing unless it was about one of her favorite things. When she *did* talk about her favorite things, she'd move, jump, and nod her head with such enthusiasm she would just *bleed.* It was like when her mom had taken her to the arcade when she was only five, and Ross had been so excited that she bled all over the Palace Arcades carpet, and the stain was still there to this day.

The nosebleeds stopped a little before Ross's mom left her and her dad. Her parents had for some reason been concerned about them *stopping,* so they took her to the doctor's. He said she'd just grown out of it.

But apparently the growing out of it was just temporary, or maybe she'd grown back *into* it, because the bleeds were back and didn't seem to be going away any time soon.

Wiping at her face with a paper towel once more, she trashed it, picked up her bookbag from the floor, and looked over her outfit to make sure there were no stains. The bell rang, telling Ross she'd been gone from class for over twenty minutes, and had just missed the rest of it. Her friends would be worrying.

So she set out into the hallway, walking to class and waiting for her friends to find her. They always did.

"Anything?" Lucas called out, leaning agaisnt the railing as Mike jogged back from the phone booth.

"We need to talk," he told them. "AV room. Right now." Ross sighed quietly, standing from the step she'd been sitting on. Mike ran up the steps next to her, turning around to look as Max stood and grabbed her skateboard.

"Party members only," he said sternly. Richie paused in his move to

stand as well.

"Come on, Mike," Dustin said.

"No! This is non-negotiable," Mike told them. He glanced at Ross, and seemed to lose his train of thought. Then it seemed to come right back, and he said in a quieter voice," Non-negotiable."

She gave Richie and apologetic look and followed Mike inside. As much as she wanted to make Mike let Richie listen, she couldn't. It would only make her seem like a hypocrite, because she didn't want Max in, either.

Inside the AV room, they all sat around, listening to Mike as he spoke. "Will didn't want me to tell anyone, but on Halloween night he saw a sort of shadow in the sky."

"A shadow?" Lucas asked. Ross raised an eyebrow, leaning in. "What kind of shadow?"

"I don't know," Mike said honestly. "But it scared him. And if Will really has True Sight...I mean, if he can really see into the Upside Down, maybe he saw that shadow again yesterday."

"So that's why he was frozen like that?" Dustin asked.

"Maybe."

"Can it hurt him?" Lucas asked. "I mean, if this shadow thing isn't from our world..." he trailed off.

"I'm not sure. Dustin? Ross?"

"Well, if you're in another plane, you can't interact with the material plane," Dustin started. "So, theoretically, no, the shadow can't hurt him."

"If that's even what's happened," Mike muttered.

"But he's been there," Ross started. "I've got no idea what you just said, but if being in the Upside Down is giving him these episides, it can obviously contact him. It can...communicate. Who's to say he isn't

linked to the Upside Down?"

"This isn't D & D," Mike began, glancing at Dustin. "This is real life. What if Ross's right?"

"Then shouldn't she be connect, too?" Dustin asked. He turned to Ross, furrowing his eyebrows. "You were there. Yeah, not as long as Will, but still long enough."

"I don't think I was in there long enough," Ross shrugged.

"But your bloody noses," Lucas added.

She looked at the ground, shaking her head. "I *doubt* it has anything to do with this. Coincidences. I got bloody noses all the time when we were kids, it's just acting up again."

"Ross," Mike said, giving her a knowing look. She shook her head, narrowing her eyes.

"It's not. Leave it be."

After her bloody nose earlier this day, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas managed to corner her without Richie and Max around. They asked her all kinds of questions. Was she feeling okay? Did her nose hurt? Did any part of her hurt? How long has she been getting nosebleeds? Was their any trigger she had noticed? She knew they were all thinking the same thing. Eleven had nosebleeds. Only when she used her powers, Ross had argued. Dustin suggested that Ross did have powers, just maybe didn't know about them. She'd scoffed and walked away. She didn't have powers.

"What do we do?" Lucas asked.

"We acquire more knowledge," Mike answered. "I'll go to Will's after school. See what's going on."

"I'll go, too," Ross piped in.

He nodded, then looked to Dustin and Lucas. "You guys stay here and find Dart."

"Dart?" Dustin asked, sitting up straighter. "What's he gotta do with this?"

"Will heard him in the Upside Down," Mike said. "I don't know how yet, but he's gotta be connected to all this. He's gotta be." Mike looked at them all, nodding as he talked.

"If we find Dart, maybe we can solve this thing. Maybe we can help Will."

After school, Ross found Richie waiting next to her locker. She sighed, stepping around him to spin in the combination. There was a moment of silence before he said anything. "Well?" he asked her.

"What?" she asked back, shoving her books into her bag. Richie grabbed her shoulder and spun her to face him.

"You owe me answers, King," he said, peering at her through his glasses. His impossibly large eyes were boring into her. "What's so big of a secret you can't tell me or Max about it?"

Ross glared, jerking her shoulder away. "I want to tell you, Richie," she said. "I want to, but I can't."

"Why not?" he asked. "Because Mike's gonna get pissy about it and whine like a little baby?"

She shook her head, slamming her locker shut. "No! It's just...it's serious, and it's...it's personal for us!"

"Personal?" he inquired. "That makes it sound like you're all having orgies in that little room of yours!"

"Ew! No!" Ross exclaimed, screwing her face up in disgust. "No, you pervert! It's just serious. We don't know if we can trust you yet. We don't even know if you'll believe us!"

"Why not?"

"Because...because it's crazy," she snapped. "No normal person would listen."

"Lucky for you, dollface, I'm not normal."

"Richie-"

"Hey." Mike was in front of both of them now, stone faced, gripping his backpack hard. "Let's go. You're coming with us," he said to Richie, nodding towards the school doors. Richie tensed, staring at his look-a-like like he'd grown an extra head.

"Mike?" Ross asked, confused. Hadn't he said it was non-negotiable?

"Let's go, Ross."

So they went. They went to Mike's house, down to his basement, and they told Richie everything.

After a bit of an arguement over it, Ross and Mike decided to start at the beginning.

"You know how kids in your town were disappearing?" Ross asked. Richie nodded, frowning. "Well, Will disappeared, too."

"What?"

"Will," Mike said. "He never made it home, one night."

"At first, we all thought he'd just gotten lost in the woods," Ross said. "And then we went to go look for him the next night, in the rain. And we found..."

She trailed off, looking to Mike. His eyes were trained on the fort. *Her* fort.

"We found a girl," Mike said. He looked to Richie. "Her name was Eleven."

"Hello?" Mike called, pounding on the door. "Will!"

"Mrs. Byers?" Ross asked, leaning in to see if she could hear anything on the other side.

The door unlocked and swung open, with just enough space for Joyce to stand in the doorway.

"Hey, Mike," Joyce sighed, smiling. "Ross, Richie." Joyce had met Richie yesterday during Will's incident. She didn't question it much, the identicalness between him and Mike, but she did give Richie an odd glance every now and then.

"Is Will here?" Mike asked, taking a step forward.

"You know what?" she said, looking back into the house. "Now-now is not a really good time."

"Is he okay?" Ross asked. Joyce sighed, stepping outside with them and closing the door behind her.

"Yeah," Joyce told her. "You know, he's just not really feeling real well. He's laying down." She placed an hand on Mike and Richie's shoulders, and began to lead them off the porch.

"So I'll tell him you stopped by, okay?" She turned back around to head inside.

"It's about the shadow monster, isn't it?" Mike asked. Joyce turned to look at them, eyes wide.

Disclaimer: I do not own the idea, plot, or characters of Stranger Things or IT

JustCrazy: Thanks! That's an interesting theory you have for Ross's 'problem'. Hopefully in today's chapter you get a bit more insight on her nosebleeds, and a bit more about Ross's mom(even though it's barely anything, aha whoops).

candy95: Thanks for the review. In this chapter, I think it's clear(hopefully), where Ross and Richie split off with. I thought about sending them with Dustin and the others, or even just one of them in one group and the other in one group, but I think sending them both off with Mike will maybe help Richie understand the whole situation a bit more, even though as of now we have no idea how Richie thinks of any of it.

A/N: One chapter early! I'm honestly surprised I did it, I thought I would forget. The next update will still be on Tuesday(I think?), just so I don't confuse myself or anyone else. Regarding the chapter, wow! I think I said last chapter is when things kick off? Well, things really kinda kick off in this one, I guess. The Party splits, and Ross and Richie both go with Mike. And Richie, he finally knows about it all. I wasn't quite sure how to fit that in, just knew that I did was Richie to know before the split, so if it's awkward and a bit confusing, I apologize. Next chapter you'll get to know a bit about how he feels and thinks of it all. But I would like to know how you guys feel about this chapter. Anyone have a favorite part? Sorry for any spelling or grammatical errors, English is not my best subject, and I apologize. I hope you guys enjoy this chapter!

-blockthewriter

8. Chapter 8

"It's like...it's like I feel what the shadow monster is feeling," Will told them. "See what he's seeing."

Will sat on his bed, facing the open window. He was drenched in sweat, looking like he'd been sick for the past few months. Mike was pacing the room, looking at the drawings Will had made that connected on the walls. Ross sat on Will's bed, too, and Richie was sitting at his desk.

"Like in the Upside Down?" Mike asked, looking over at his friend.

"Some of him is there, but some of him is here, too," Will said. He was staring, but didn't seem to be looking at anything in front of him. It scared Ross to see him look do dazed yet completely aware at the same, and she could tell it was getting to Mike and Richie, too.

"Here, like, in this house?" Mike asked.

"In this house and..." Will paused, struggling to get his next words out. "In *me*."

Ross looked at him, concerned laced into her features. The bed shifted and Mike sat down next to her, eyes trained on Will.

"It's like he's reaching into Hawkins more and more," Will explained.

Richie caught Ross's eyes, mouthing," he?"

She shrugged. How did Will know that this *thing* was a he? Did it even have a gender?

"And the more he spreads, the more connected to him I feel."

"And the more you see these now-memories," Mike muttered.

"Now-memories?" Richie asked outloud. It was obvious the kid was still working to grasp the concept of everything.

Will ignored him, "At first I just felt it in the back of my head." He

reached a hand up to his neck and Ross furrowed her eyebrows. "I didn't even really know it was there. It's like when you have a dream and you can't remember it unless you think really hard.

"It was like that. But now it's like...now I remember," Will said. Ross noticed just how bad he was shaking. "I remember all the time."

"Maybe," Mike started," maybe that's good."

"Good?" Will asked, turning to look around Ross at Mike.

"Just think about it, Will," Mike continued. "You're like a spy now. A superspy. Spying on the shadow monster."

"If you know what he's seeing and feeling," Ross said, looking up to meet Will's eyes.

"Maybe that's how we can stop this thing," Richie finished.

"Maybe all of this is happening for a reason," Mike said, looking around the room.

"You really think so?" Will asked.

"Yeah. Yeah, I really do."

Will looked down to the floor, prompting Mike, Ross, and Richie to look as well. It was a drawing of what she assumed was the shadow monster.

"What if he figures out we're spying on him?" Will asked, sniffing. "What if he spies back?"

"He won't," Mike assured him.

"How do you know?"

Mike reached over Ross and put his hand on top of Will's shaking one. "We won't let him."

Richie woke up to Will's gasping. He sat up from his spot on the floor,

snatched his glasses from the spot next to him, and turned to look at the still-sweating boy. Mike sat up, too, looking at Will with concern.

"Will, what's wrong?"

Will turned and stared at Mike with wide eyes, breathing heavy. It creeped Richie out. Was the kid okay? Will rolled off his bed and began to make his way to the door. Mike and Richie glanced at each other before they both got up to follow.

He went down the hallway and to the living room, where his mom sat in the middle of the floor, staring at the drawings with a phone by her side.

What is she doing? Richie asked himself.

"Mom?" Will asked, approaching her. "Mom?"

She didn't answer, so he laid a hand on her shoulder. "Mom."

Joyce gasped quietly and turned around, laying a hand on Will's. "Yeah?"

"I saw him."

Richie furrowed his eyebrows.

"You saw who, baby?"

"Hopper."

Who the fuck is Hopper? Richie thought back to Mike and Ross telling him about everything. Hadn't they mentioned a Hopper? He was a man, a police officer.

"I think he's in trouble."

Suddenly, he remembered. He'd been the one to go into the Upside Down to get Will out. He'd helped them at the school with the tank, and he'd been leading the investigation to find Will in the first place. But where had Will seen him? How was he in trouble?

"I think he's going to die."

Oh. That's how.

"Can you two go wake Ross up?" Joyce asked Mike and Richie, getting to her feet. She put her arms around Will and nodded towards the hall. Mike and Richie both nodded and said yes at the same time, only reminding Richie about how eerily similar they were. It freaked him out. The kid was his spitting image, but without glasses. It was comforting to know, however, that their personalities were nearly complete opposites. Richie had yet to see Mike when he wasn't serious, and was beginning to think he was always like that. *What a shame,* he thought, *wasted a nice face with zero sense of humor.* He had no problem with Mike, just thought the guy could loosen up a bit.

Mike led Richie to another room, which he assumed was Jonathan's, Will's older brother. Joyce had allowed Ross to sleep in the older boy's room, so she didn't have to sleep on the floor with Richie and Mike.

They knocked quietly first, and when there was no answer, Mike pushed the door open. As it turned out, Ross slept on the floor anyways.

All she had was a pillow tucked beneath her head, and a thin blanket to warm her, but other than that just curled in on herself, hugging her legs in an attempt to keep warm. Mike sighed, shaking his head slightly.

"She always does this," Mike muttered, glancing at Richie.

"Does what?" he asked, taking a step forward to nudge Ross with his foot. She didn't move.

"Sleeps on the floor. Whenever she spends the night she sleeps on the ground instead of the couch or a bed. One time she even slept on the coffee table in our basement," Mike told him.

"She's weird," Richie said with a shrug. He kicked her lightly again.

"And awake," Ross said from the floor, making Richie and Mike jump. Her eyes were still closed and she curled in tighter. "Touch me with

that damn foot one more time Tozier and I'll shove it up your own ass."

"Kinky," he said, earning a slap to his ankle from Ross and an eyeroll from Mike. He smirked, letting out snort.

Mike knelt down in front of her, grabbing her shoulder. "Come on, get up," he told her. "It's Will. He saw Hopper." This made Ross sit up and climb to her feet. Her hair was wild, at least wilder than normal. Richie had thought she just had bedhead all the time, until now.

"Hopper? Is he okay?"

"Says he's gonna die," Richie told her. Mike elbowed him.

"Said he think he might," the boy corrected. "Come on."

Back in Will's room, Will was scribbling away on a peice of paper, Joyce leaned over his shoulder. With a closer look, Richie realized he was drawing another one of the pictures that were taped to the walls. Will stopped, setting his crayon down.

Ms. Byers leaned forward, touching the paper lightly and asking Will," Hey, is this where you saw him? Is this where you saw Hopper?"

"I think so," Will said quietly. "Yeah."

"Okay," Joyce said quietly, sliding the paper off the desk and glancing at Richie, Mike, and Ross.

Mike and Ross turned to scour the walls, searching for the place the new drawing could possibly connect. Richie stood in front of a few pictures, staring at it lamely. How could they tell where it went? How had Will seen Hopper there? The drawing held absolutely no content, at least not any he could see.

This is just fucking weird, he thought to himself, moving down the row of drawings to look for another empty space. What were they looking for? What did these drawings mean?

When Ross and Mike had first told Richie about everything, about El,

the Upside Down, the Demogorgon, and Hawkins Laboratory with the bad men, he was skeptical. Skeptical, but still finding himself believing every word they said. The two weren't liars, and after they'd explained how Dart was connected, and what was happening to Will(although they couldn't really explain that), it all made sense. He tried hard, though, to *not* believe. He didn't want to believe it. But it seemed like even if he didn't, he was going to be dragged along for the ride anyhow. So he made a joke and rolled with it.

However, the thought came to his mind to tell them about *his* experiences, and *his* monster. To tell them about the clown that terrorized him and his friends for the better part of the year, if not in person than in their heads. Richie couldn't count how many times he thought It would pop out of the shadows and take him in one bite.

The thing was, he wasn't sure they would believe him. Some part of him said be was being irrational. Why would they *not?* After everything they'd been though? Everything they *were* going through, at the moment.

Another part of him said there was no need. IT was dead. Gone, as far as Richie was concerned. No point in bringing something back from the grave, even if it was just through words. They all had enough to worry about anyway.

So he kept his lips sealed, for once, and decided that maybe someday he would tell them. Maybe someday, in the far off future, when he was beginning to forget the events anyway. That's what he wished for. But he had the sneaking suspicion that Ross would weed it out of him before then.

"Here!"

Richie found Mike in the kitchen, pointing at an empty spot on the fridge. Ross and Joyce came over to them, and the older women held the drawing in it's spot.

"Okay, so...so Hopper is here?" she asked, tapping the paper lightly.

"Yeah," Mike nodded.

"So now we just need to find out where 'here' is, right?" Richie asked.

"Right," Joyce said, looking around for some tape.

"Did he say anything? I mean, before he left?" Mike asked, drawing her attention.

"Uh, some..." Joyce shook her head, sighing. "Something about vines?"

"Guys?" Ross asked. They turned to see her standing near the window, peering through the glass. "Someone's coming."

"Hopper," Joyce said, jogging to stand next to Ross in the living room. Richie noted the disappointment on her face when a red car pulled up instead of a police vehicle. He watched as a heavy, middle aged man exited the car, shutting his door just to grab something from the backseat. It looked like a stack of board games.

Joyce slid out the front door, and Richie, Mike, and Ross moved out of view from the window.

"Who is that?" Richie asked them. "Not Hopper, right?"

He'd imagined Hopper as taller. More impressive.

"No," Ross shook her head. "God no."

"That's Bob," Mike explained. "Joyce's boyfriend."

"Bob's here?"

They all spun around to see Will standing in the hall.

"Yeah," Ross said. "Outside with your mom."

Just as she said it the door opened, and Joyce and Bob entered the house. Instantly the man's eyes were drawn to the pictures taped to everything. He opened his mouth then closed it, walking along until he stopped in front of one of the walks. They all stepped behind him, gaging his reaction.

"Huh," he said. "Hmm. You drew all these yourself?" He turned to glance at Will. Richie raised an eyebrow. That was his only question? *What kinda dipshit is this?*

Will nodded, and Bob looked back to the drawings.

"Why, exactly?"

"I...I told you the rules," Joyce said, pointing a finger at him. "No questions, okay?"

She started towards another room, saying," We-we just need you to help us figure out what...Bob?"

He hadn't followed, but still stared at the pictures. Richie gave him a curious look, before noticing Mike and Ross with the same expression. This guy was weird.

"Bob? Over here," Joyce said, waving him over. He gave his stack of games to Mike and followed Joyce. Mike passed it off to Richie, who passed it to Ross, who glared and sat it down on the nearest table.

"Where this is," Joyce said, drawing on the paper Will had given her this morning with an X.

"That's the objective," Mike told him. "Find the X."

"Yeah?" Bob asked. "What's at the X? Pirate treasure?" He looked up at Joyce and chuckled.

"Bob, no questions," Joyce said sternly.

"Okay," Bob nodded, looking back to the X.

"But if imagining it's pirate treasure makes you feel better about yourself," Richie spoke up, drawing in Bob's attention. "Go for it."

Bob sighed, clicking his tongue. He grabbed Joyce's shoulder and pulled her in. "Let me talk to you for a second. Hang on guys, gal." He led Joyce into the nearest room so they could talk in private.

Ross sighed, moving to sit at the table. They boys followed and sat

down as well. "Think he'll be able to figure it out?" she asked, slumping in her seat.

"I hope so," Mike shrugged. "He said he was good at puzzle's."

"Yeah, but is he *that* good?" Richie asked. "I mean, this guys looks like a nerd, but you guys are nerds, too, and can't figure it out."

"Okay, whoa," Ross said, holding up a finger. "I am *not* a nerd. You look more like a nerd than I do, with those magnifying glasses on your face." Richie stuck his tongue out at her, and she flipped him off.

"He's good at puzzles," Mike said with a shrug. "Let's hope this counts as one."

As if on cue, Bob came down the hallway, talking loudly about lakes and quarries. He rounded the corner with Joyce in tow. "And if you just follow it naturally...it moves to...the Eno River."

Ross frowned, glancing at the boys before back to Bob. "And there it is," he said, pointing at a string of drawings. "That's the Eno, do you see it?"

Joyce stared, cocking her head.

"Okay, so the lines aren't roads," Bob told them, walking past Joyce and into the next room. "But they *act* like roads 'cause when you follow 'em, you'll see they don't go over water."

Richie arched an eyebrow. He didn't see that at all, but judging from everyone else's expression, they didn't either.

"And that's the giveaway," Bob said. "That's the give away. Ha!" He walked around their table, gesturing at the drawings. "Don't you get it? It's not a puzzle."

"It's a map," Ross said from the table. Bob pointed at her.

"It's a map of Hawkins," he confirmed, nodding.

Joyce's mouth dropped, and the boys glanced at eachother, then to

Ross, who was staring at the papers with suspicion.

"Right, Will?" Bob asked, looking to the younger boy.

"All right," Bob said, setting a map down on the table. He laid down a ruler on top of it and pulled a pen from his pocket. "All right. I'm 3.6 inches, what do you got?"

"I'm not sure," Mike called from another room in the house. "Richie?"

"Hold on," Richie said, pulling his side of the measure string down the hall. He placed his end in the center of Tippecanoe. "Twenty-one feet, four inches."

"What about Tippecanoe to Danford Creek?" Bob asked them.

"Tippecanoe to Danford" Ross repeated, running over to where Richie was at. She placed her end next to his and looked to Joyce.

"Danford," the woman muttered. "Where's Danford?"

"Dining room!" Will exclaimed, pointing towards the creek. Joyce nodded, pulling her string and placing it in the middle.

"Sixteen feet, ten inches," Joyce said loud enough for Bob to hear.

"What about Danford to Jordan?"

"Oh come on," Joyce groaned. "This-this has gotta be enough." She pulled on the string, and Ross followed her into the room Bob was in, Richie and Mike not far behind.

"It's not. It's...it's really not," Bob stressed.

"Okay, can't you figure it out?"

"Well, it's hard," Bob stuttered. "The ratio isn't exactly one-to-one. I mean, if you're twisting my arm, and you are twisting my arm, I would say that the X is...maybe a half mile southeast of Danford?"

Joyce smiled, and leaned in to kiss Bob's cheek," Thank you. Thank

you." She pulled the map from the table and ran out of the room. The kids followed, and Bob got up from the table.

"What? Are we...are we really going?" he asked chasing after them.

They took Joyce's car to go find Hopper. They started at Danford Creek and went Southeast, like Bob had said. So far, they'd only seen feilds of empty nothingness, frustrating Ross, and everyone else within the car.

"There's nothing," Mike said, looking out the car window. "There's nothing here." Him, Ross, Will, and Richie were all crammed in the back, Mike and Richie at the windows with Will and Ross squished in between.

"Are...are we close?" Joyce asked, glancing over to Bob who was searching the map.

"We're in the vicinity," he told them.

"What's that mean, the vicinity?" Joyce asked.

"The area?" Richie asked.

"It means we're close!" Bob exclaimed. "I don't know. It's not precise."

"But we did all that work," Joyce stressed.

"I told you, the scale ratio is not exactly one-to-one!"

Ross sighed, and noticed Will close his eyes.

"Will?"

Richie and Mike looked too, furrowing their eyebrows. Mike opened his mouth to say something, but Will jumped forward, snapping his eyes open and saying," Turn right."

"What?" Joyce asked, turning back to look at her son.

"I saw him," Will told them.

"Where?" Joyce asked, leaning forward and squinting out the window.

"Not here. In my now-memories."

"In your what?" Bob asked, turning back to look at them.

"Turn right!" Will exclaimed. Joyce obliged, taking a sharp turn off the road.

"Holy shit!" Richie shouted as they ran through a sign and some haybales.

Ross yelped, bracing her hands agaisnt the seat in front of her as Joyce then slammed on the breaks.

"Are you okay?" Joyce asked them, turning around. Right in front of them was Hopper's truck. They were all breathing heavy, clutching the seats in front of them.

"Superspy," Mike said, looking at Will.

"Where the fuck are my glasses?" Ross turned to see Richie feeling his face. Now, without his glasses, he looked nearly identical to Mike. "Fucking shit, if those things broke-"

"Calm down, they're right here," Ross said, leaning over to pick them up from the car floor.

"What's Jim doing here?" Bob asked. "Joyce?"

Joyce didn't answer, but instead unbuckled her seat belt and opened the car door. "Boys, Ross, I need you to stay here."

"No, no, no, mom, it's not safe," Will said, leaning into the front seats to try and grab her.

"That's why I need you to stay here!" Bob opened his door and got out as well. "Stay here!"

Joyce shut the door, and Ross immediately crawled into the passengers seat, looking through the windshield. Joyce called

Hopper's name, and then walked over some smashed pumpkins.

"Oh god, is that a hole?" Ross asked, watching as Joyce began to descend into the side of the pit.

"A hole?" Mike asked, leaning forward to try and get a better look. Ross nodded and began to reach for the door handle.

"I'm going out to-"

"No!"

Hands grabbed at the back of her shirt, and she was pulled backwards, halfway into the backseat again.

"Mom said to stay here," Will said, placing a hand on her shoulder. She was halfway into the kid's lap, with Mike and Richie clutching either one of her arms.

"You're fucking retard," Richie hissed. "Do you wanna die?"

"No one's gonna die," Mike said," but we have to stay in, okay?"

"Okay, okay, just let me go!" Ross exclaimed, grabbing the seats and pulling herself back up. "Wait. Where'd they go?"

"They're gone?" Will asked. This time, Ross was too fast for any of them to stop her. She leapt out the door and hurried to the edge of the hole. The boys came out after her, and lined up next to her.

"They went in there?" Richie asked.

"Do you see anything?" Mike asked Will, "I mean, in your now-memories?" Will shook his head.

They heard the sound of approaching vehicles. They all turned, watching as three vans turned onto the field. Ross recognized them. "Fuck."

The men paid them no mind, however, as they exited the vans in white suits with big flashlights. They just told them to stay back, and began to scour the feild. Some went down into the hole Joyce and

Bob had went in.

"These are the bad men?" Richie whispered to Mike as one of the men leaned down to look at a pumpkin.

"No," Mike shook his head. "Apparently all the bad men were moved out. But these guys *are* from Hawkin's Lab."

Richie nodded, catching up with Will and Ross, who despite being told to stay back, were walking forward to get a better look at what was happening.

Suddenly, Will grunted and collapsed right into the dirt. Immediately they were all by his side, asking what was wrong and what was happening.

"Will? Will, you okay?"

Will began to shake, concerning them even further.

"Will, what's wrong?" Ross asked, grabbing him and attempting to roll him over. He did, but then opened his mouth and let out an ear piercing screech.

Ross yelped, falling backwards and scrambling a few feet away. Mike and Richie stepped in the opposite direction.

A sharp pain wedged itself right behind Ross's eyes, and she covered her ears. The noise was inhumane, and it made her feel like her head was about to explode. Rolling onto her knees she doubled over, crying out as the pain got worse.

She could feel the blood on her lips, taste it in her mouth. It was when she felt the blood coming from her ears that her eyes rolled up into her head and she passed out.

"Get him out! Go! Go!"

The men had taken them to what Richie would learn was Hawkins Lab. With everything he'd been told about the place, he didn't understand why Joyce was allowing them to take Will and Ross

there, but realized they didn't have much of an option.

Will was on a gurney, screaming in pain as they wheeled him down the halls. Ross was in a stretcher just behind them, passed out quietly.

"Hold on, sweetie!" Joyce exclaimed, keeping in pace next to her son as they sprinted. Richie kept glancing back to check on Ross, and began to panic when they ushered Hopper down another hallway, and turned to take Ross down it as well.

"Ross!" Mike exclaimed, stopping for a second before Bob snatched the sleeve of his jacket. In turn, he grabbed Richie's Hawaiian shirt as well, and they continued to follow Will's stretcher.

"I'm right here," Joyce told Will. "Just hold on!" They entered a smaller room, moving Will from the stretcher to a real hospital bed.

They practically shoved Richie and Mike into the corner, telling them to stay out of the way. It was hard to say he wasn't panicking by now. This would have been Eddie's worst nightmare. Will was still crying and screaming, sweating through his clothes, and Ross had been bleeding from her nose *and* her ears, then passed out. Richie could already imagine the shorter boy pacing back and forth, using his inhaler and muttering about hospital procedures.

"Vitals?" one of the nurses asked, leaning over Will's body.

"Heart rate 220. Temperature's 106."

The nurse grabbed Will on either side of his face, asking," Will, where does it hurt?"

"All over," Will groaned through the breathing mask. They began to cut through his clothes.

"She says he feels like he's burning," a man said. "Check for burns."

"I don't see any."

"Holy fuck," Richie said, running a hand through his hair. He looked to Mike. "This bad."

"Where does it hurt the most, Will?"

"Everywhere! Everywhere!" Will cried. Joyce was crying, and Bob was doing his best to hold her back. Richie winced as they jammed a needle into his arm, and sedated him.

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JustCrazy: Thanks for reviewing! Yes, her parents do get concerned with her nosebleeds stopping, and soon you'll finally get the answers to all of your questions! As for Ross's dad, he actually doesn't know anything about Hawkins Lab, at least not about the events that are occurring now, but that's not to say he's never been involved with the Lab in some way. I'll let you take that however way you want!

candy95: Thanks for the review! Next chapter we finally get to the Lab! I'm excited for you to see how Ross and Richie react in the situations to come!

A/N: Ah, an update on Tuesday just like I said. i honestly nearly forgot. i was very much consumed with my art and homework, it nearly slipped away. But, alas, here it is. This chapter, Bob comes in! I really did like Bob. Of course, I'm all for Jopper, and I wasn't particularly savvy with Bob and Joyce's relationship, but I actually really liked Bob's character. Anyway, next chapter comes Hawkins Lab! The next few chapters were probably my favorite to write. I'm not sure why, but it probably has something to do with the fact that the episode it's primarily focused on is my favorite. Regarding this chapter, I hope you liked it! Sorry for many grammar mistakes and/or spelling errors. This chapter there will most likely be a lot more than usual, because the past 3 days have been crazy hectic. Hope you enjoy! Peaces!

- blockthewriter

9. Chapter 9

Richie woke up to Bob calling for a doctor. He fumbled in his chair, throwing his blanket off and reaching for his face. Everything was fuzzy. Someone had taken his glasses off.

He really didn't like it when people did that. When *he* took them off, he knew where he put them, or at least the general area. When other people took it upon themselves to remove them, he literally had no idea where they would be.

"Eyes," he mumbled, still not quite awake. "Blind."

"Here," Mike said from his right, pressing his glasses into his palm, and he quickly shoved them onto his face. Mike was next to him, sitting up in his chair and leaning forward. In front of him leaned over a now-awake Will, was Joyce.

Richie felt a rush of quick relief flood through him. He'd be lying if he said he didn't think that Will was going to die, at least once.

"Sweetie, how are you feeling?" Joyce asked. "You okay?"

"They're on their way," Bob said, reentering the room and moving to stand by Joyce. He smiled at Will. "Hey."

Will stared up at him blankly. "Who is that?"

Richie raised his eyebrows, turning his head slightly to glance at his look-a-like, whose face was written with concern.

Joyce cocked her head, seeming just a puzzled. "What?"

Bob chuckled. "It's me, big guy. It's Bob." He reached for Will's hand, but the boy swiftly moved it away.

"Are you a...doctor?" Will asked steadily, looking the man up and down. Richie leaned forward, furrowing his eyebrows. Did Will not remember?

"No. No, it's just me," Bob shook his head, tapping his chest.

"Just...just Bob."

This was clearly a problem. Will didn't remember Bob. But he couldn't have amnesia because he clearly remembered his mom. Did he remember Mike? Did he remember Richie? What had caused it?

Mike gave Richie a look that expressed clear concern. Obviously he'd been thinking along the same lines.

When Dr. Owens came in he got straight to it, checking Will's eyes and asking him questions.

"Do you know your name?"

"Will."

"Your full name?"

"William Byers."

"Do you know who I am?"

They all stood around his bed, Owens at his side, two other doctors standing agaisnt the wall. Hopper was there too, now, standing next to Joyce. Bob, Richie, and Mike all stood at the foot of the bed.

"A...doctor," Will answered.

"Have we met before?"

"I don't remember," Will said quietly. Owens hummed thoughtfully.

"You don't remember me? Okay," he said. He looked around, before pointing back to Mike. "How about, uh...how about this guy here?"

Mike gave a small wave and a tentative smile as Will turned to look at him.

"Know who that is?"

Will didn't say anything, he just stared. Maybe he didn't remember Mike either. Maybe he forgot everything. "It's all right. Take your time."

"That's my friend," Will said slowly. "Mike." He eyes slid to Richie, and he furrowed his eyebrows a bit. "But...I don't remember his twin."

"Not his twin," Richie said quietly. "I'm Richie. Also...your friend."

Maybe Will had just gotten short-term memory loss? Maybe when he fell he hit his head too hard. Was it even possible to develop short-term memory loss? *Eddie would know,* Richie found himself thinking. He couldn't help but feel disappointed that Will hadn't remembered him, but pushed the thought away. It's not like the boy had done it on purpose.

Owens nodded, sighing a bit. "That's okay, that's alright. What about your redheaded friend? The girl? She isn't in the room, you remember her?"

They were talking about Ross. Joyce had come back the previous night telling them that she was okay. They were just running some tests to see what was wrong with her.

It made Richie nervous, and he could ell it made Mike and Joyce nervous as well. It clearly wasn't nothing. The nosebleeds were a bit concerning to start, but when they progressed to the point that someone passed out? It practically screamed 'Dead man walking' to Richie, as much as he hated to think about it. What if one day, it got so bad that she died of blood loss? Or her eyes popped out from the pressure. *That's ridiculous, Richie,* he could imagine Richie telling him.

Richie did is best to agree.

It took Will a few minutes to answer. He closed his eyes, trying to imagine her in his head. "Ross," he said finally, opening his eyes. "Roslyn King."

"What about me, kid?" Hopper asked. "You remember me?"

Will shook his head.

"They tell me you helped save me last night. You remember that?"

Will shook his head once more.

"Do you remember anything about last night?" Owens asked. "About what happened?"

"I remember...they hurt me," Will answered.

"You mean the doctors?" Owens asked.

Will shook his head. "No. The soldiers."

Richie frowned. *What soldiers?* He shared a glance with Mike, before turning his attention back to Owens.

"The soldiers hurt you?"

"They shouldn't have done that," Will said. "It upset him."

The doctor reached into a blue folder and pulled out a photo. "You say, 'Upset him'. Is that him?" Will took the picture in his hands, assessing it. He looked at Owens and nodded.

Richie didn't get a good look at the picture, but judging from what he knew, he guessed it was a photo of one of Will's drawings of the Shadow Monster.

"Okay, I wanna try something," Owens said to Joyce, sliding the picture back into his file. "It's gonna seem a little odd at first, but I think it's really gonna help us understand what's going on here."

He turned back to look at Will. "Is that okay?"

"Okay," Will said quietly, nodding.

They wheeled in some sort of open tank, and Richie caught sight of a throbbing, burnt looking tentacle within it. Some part of him felt compelled to spit a joke. Maybe ask if that's what STD's did to your junk. But the room felt too tense for any sort of jokes, so he bit his tongue. Mike made a quiet noise of disgust. The two moved over next to Hopper, and Mike jumped up onto the counter while Richie leaned agaisnt it.

"Now, Will, I want you to let us know if you feel anything," Owens instructed. "Okay?" He nodded to one of the doctors, who held a

small blow torch. They lit it.

What the fuck, Richie thought.

The man held it directly above the tank, and the thing inside it made a soft screech. Owens turned to Will. "Do you feel anything?"

Will breathed in deeply. "Lit-little sting."

"It stings? Where?"

"My chest," Will grunted, bringing a hand up. Richie heard the heart monitor speed up.

"Okay, son," Owens said, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Sweetie," Joyce said, leaning in. The man lowered the torch.

"How about now?" Owens asked.

"It...burns," Will said, squirming uncomfortably. Richie stood up straight, frowning as the man lowered in closer to the tank again.

"Ah!" Will exclaim, sitting up. "It burns."

"Where?"

"Everywhere!"

Richie winced as the thing in the tank screeched again, moving so much that the tank began to move, too.

"That's enough," Joyce said. "That's enough!"

Will let out a pained cry, and the glass on the tank began to crack. They were hurting him, Richie quickly realized

"Stop!" Hopper jumped in. "You heard her! That's enough! That's it! We're done."

The man moved the blow torch away, and the tentacle stopped squealing.

"Okay," Owens sighed, sitting back.

The monitor began to decline, going back to a normal speed.

"Sweetie...sweetie," Joyce murmured at Will's side. "It's okay."

Owens took Joyce and Hopper into the hall to discuss.

"Our best guess right now is it's some kind of virus," Owens explained," which is causing this neurological disorder. Now, when-when a typical virus attaches itself to its host it duplicates, right?" He moved his hands as if doing so would help them understand.

"It spreads, essentially hijacking the host. A virus is alive. It has an intelligence. That's not-that's not unusual."

Owens paused, pointing down the hall towards Will's room. "What is so unusual here, this virus-the infected hosts seem to be communicating. It has some sort of a hive of intelligence, and it's connecting to all the hosts.

"The good news is a virus can be cured," Owens continued. "We...we're gonna continue to run tests. We're gonna see what we find."

"What happens when he can't remember anything?" Joyce asked, on the verge of tears. "Wh-when there's nothing else there? What happens when my boy is gone?" She began to cry, and Jim placed an arm around her shoulder.

"We won't let it get that far," Owens reassured her.

"Why don't you head on back," Jim suggested to Joyce. "I'm gonna ask him a few more questions."

She nodded, and went back down the hall to her son's room.

Hopper sighed, leaning agaisnt the wall.

"What about...what about Ross?" he asked. "The girl? What's her deal, she okay?"

Owens straightened up, pursing his lips. "We've, uh, we've ran some tests," he said. "She seems to have this...virus. The same Will has, but it's not exactly..."

He trailed off, waving his hand as if he would pull the words out of thin air. "Manifested," he said finally. Jim blinked, furrowing his eyebrows.

"The same virus? You don't mean-"

"That's exactly what I mean," Owens said, nodding. "But it hasn't exactly manifested yet, like I said, and it looks like the nosebleeds, headaches, and trauma she's been experiencing is her body trying to purge itself of the virus. But...it is...it could be dangerous.

"However, since it hasn't settled," the doctor continued," since it isn't rooted yet, but it *could* root still, we could keep her here, try and purge her of the virus sooner, and maybe run some tests to see why or *how* the virus manifests and-"

"No," Hopper said sharply, startling Owens. "No way. She isn't going to become another one of those labrats."

He thought of Eleven. Everything she had gone through. Her lack of human contact had effected her deeply. She was emotional and didn't know how to handle things. She was still learning what it was like to be in the real world, and she hadn't even actually been out yet. Hopper refused to put anyone else through that. If he could stop it, he would.

"Of course not, she wouldn't be," Owens said. "But if we could keep her here, and try new things we could find a way to get rid of it, and we could-"

"No!" Jim yelled, suddenly. "Her body's getting rid of it itself, you just said that. She doesn't need you guys poking her with needles, or expirimenting. How would that not be like the others. How would that not be like *her*."

He'd only spoken with Ross King a handful of times. She was confident and stubborn, as far as he could tell. He could only imagine

how being locked inside of Hawkins Lab would be like for her. All he saw was El, curly hair and big brown eyes, staring at him and asking why things were the way they were. He shook his head.

But in actuality, Hopper could think of a lot of ways this was different. She didn't have powers like Eleven, she was just sick. Sick like Will, and he wondered if they would try to keep Will there like they were with Ross. He wouldn't let them.

Jim leaned forward, glaring at Owens menacingly. "I want her in that room with us within the next half hour, or else I *will* tear this place apart looking for her."

Owens stared back with a stoney face, before giving a reluctant nod.

"Yes. Of course," he agreed, taking a step back. Hopper nodded, and then turned and left before Owens could change his mind.

Ross sighed as the door opened once more. It was just going to be another nurse, with another test, and another deny to see her friends. It frustrated her. None of them had told her anything about Will.

"What we're concerned with here is you, and your health," they told her. She'd shouted, telling them that she didn't give a shit, and they could shove their concern back up their asses. She'd demand to see her friends. The nurse would leave, and a new one would come in later.

This time, however, it wasn't a nurse. It was an old man, short with white hair.

"Hello, Roslyn," he said, setting a file down on one of the counters. "I'm Dr. Owens."

"I'm not doing another test," she said, getting straight to the point. "I want to see my friends. I want to see Will."

She was very worried about him. The last thing she remembered was the boy convulsing on the ground. When she'd woken up, she hadn't even been sure if he was still alive.

"I understand that," Dr. Owens said, nodding. "And you will here soon." She arched an eyebrow suspiciously.

"Promise?"

Much to her surprise, Owens held up his hand, pinky out. "I pinky promise." She knew it was childish, but as a person who did childish things on a daily basis, she didn't care. She twisted her pinky with his own, and he gave it a slight shake.

"Wonderful," he said, nodding. "First, however, we need to discuss some things. Like these nose bleeds you've been having."

Ross groaned. "I've been talking about them for the past hour. I already told the nurses everything I know."

Owens nodded. "Yes, now it's time for us to tell you everything we know."

"You found out what's wrong with me?" Ross asked, leaning forward. "What is it? Will the nose bleeds stop?"

"I'm afraid not," Owens said, grabbing his file. "In fact, they may become more frequent in the upcoming weeks, until your body heals itself."

Ross furrowed her eyebrows. "Heals itself?"

"You were involved in the incident last year," Owens continued. "You've met...Eleven."

Ross fiddled with the blanket draped over her legs. "Yeah. Yeah, I did."

"And you had crossed The Gate into the alternate dimension, and was inside for roughly...14 hours?"

"Yes," she said. "Is...did something happen?"

"It seems you've developed a...virus," Owens told her handing her the file. "I don't expect you to read it now, and I won't be surprised if you never do. It just describes the neurological changes you went through

during your time on the other side. Had you been in for much longer...Will wouldn't be the only one in his position."

Ross cast her eyes down to the file. Her name was written across it in bold sharpie, although it was spelled wrong.

"So...I have...a virus?" she asked, peering up at Owens. He nodded. "What is it?"

"We aren't quite sure," he said. "You're friend Will, he has the same one. Whatever this...creature is on the otherside has imprinted on him, and infected him with this virus. However, since you were in the otherside for a shorter amount of time, the monster had less time to manifest. Your nosebleeds are just your body trying to purge itself of the virus."

"But if I have the same thing Will has, why isn't he getting nosebleeds," Ross asked. "Why is he having episodes?"

"The virus hasn't yet managed to root itself inside you like it had with Will," Owens explained. "Your body is fighting it."

"Will he be okay?" Ross asked. "What's happening to him?"

"Nothing we can't handle," Owens reassured her. "He'll be fine. Trust me."

For some reason, she did trust him. "Will I be okay?"

"Yes," Owens nodded. "If your body continues to fight the virus, the virus will die off. You'll continue to have nosebleeds. For how long, we aren't sure. It could stop soon, or you could have them for the rest of your life. But we do know that it's nothing too dangerous, and you'll be fine."

She sighed, rubbing her face. "But that's it, right? Nothing else is happening to me?"

"Nothing else is happening," Owens assured her, smiling. "Now, why don't we get you to your friends?"

The door to the room swung open, and Joyce stood, expecting Dr. Owens. Instead, it was a nurse, with a pale and cold looking Ross at her heels. Immediately Mike and Richie leapt to their feet, rushing to her side.

"Ross!" Mike exclaimed, relief flooding through his chest. She smiled, and he couldn't help but smile back. She looked healthy, like usual, as if she hadn't just passed out, bleeding from her nose and ears the previous day. If anything, she just looked tired, and cold. He could see the goosebumps on her legs. She turned to the nurse, looking up to meet the woman's eyes.

"Any chance you could get me my clothes back?" Ross asked. Mike finally noticed she was wearing a hospital gown, with black shorts and a black tanktop underneath. Her feet were bare and she had her toes curled in.

"I'll see what I can do," the nurse told her. Ross nodded, and the older woman left. As soon as the door clicked shut, Ross spun around, hugging herself.

"Holy fucking shit it's cold!" she exclaimed, aiming herself to the nearest person and bumping herself into their chest. Mike recognized this as her invitation to hug her, and so he wrapped his arms around her shivering form.

"You look like shit," Richie, ever the gentleman, said while grabbing a blanket from one of the chairs. Ross left Mike for the blanket, quickly wrapping it around her shoulders.

"Thanks, Richard," she said shortly, giving him a look for the comment. He only smiled, and she finally noticed Will. He was already staring at her, eyes blank. "Will! Are you okay?"

She rushed to his side, looking him up and down. He was extremely pale, with bags under his eyes, which seemed darker than normal. Not to mention the fact that he somehow seemed smaller, more skinny. He stared blankly, with no emotion. Ross couldn't tell if it was because he was still in a daze, or if something more sinister was taking affect. She prayed it to me the former. "What happened?" She looked to Joyce. "Did they find out what was wrong?"

Joyce sighed, shaking her head slightly. "They're supposed to be getting back to us," she explained. "But we're glad you're okay. Come here." She held open her arms, giving Ross a genuine smile that seemed to make her physically warm up.

Ross gave Will a quick glance before rounding his bed into Joyce's arm. The woman rubbed her back before giving her a tight hug. She released her and asked, "Did they find out what happened with you?"

Ross nodded, finally revealing the file she had tucked under her arm. "Yeah, they did." She gave Bob a quick glance. "I don't want to talk about it. Not now."

Joyce nodded in understanding, giving her a smile. Ross set the file down on a counter, and pattered back over to the otherside of the room to sit in one of the chairs, wrapping the blanket around herself even tighter. She nodded towards Richie. "You. Got another blanket?"

"Here, she can have this one," Bob said, standing up to hand Richie the blanket he had. Ross thanked him, and asked Richie to tuck the blanket around her legs.

"I'm freezing," she explained at the odd look he gave her. "Just do it. Please."

They spent the next twenty minutes explaining to Ross everything that had happened, from Will's amnesia to the test they'd performed with the tentacle(which Ross found cruel and creepy on various levels). Just as Ross was about to ask her own question, the door swung open once more.

Joyce stood up, again, but was disappointed as the nurse from before came in again. "I've got clothes," she told Ross. The girl practically jumped onto her feet, only to be disappointed at the sight of neatly folded scubs.

"Where are my clothes?" she asked, giving the uniform a calculating stare.

"Right here," the nurse said, furrowing her eyebrows. Ross shook her head and crossed her arms.

"No. *My* clothes. The clothes I was wearing," Ross said. The nurse's mouth formed an 'O', in understanding, before she nodded.

"We had them burned."

"Burned?" Ross blanched. "Why?"

"It's protocal," the nurse explained. "You'll have to make due with these, or wear the gown." Ross frowned, and picked the shirt off the top pile. It unfolded, and her expression dropped.

"These aren't even my size."

The nurse gave an apologetic smile.

Ross handed the shirt back to the lady, but picked up the socks from the pile. "I'll take these." The lady nodded, and left the room. Ross turned to Richie and Mike, looking thoroughly unimpressed.

She sat back down and slipped on the socks, and the boys helped tuck her in the blankets again. She was still cold, and she soon found her eyelids growing heavy. Shifting to find a more comfortable position, she moved around until she was sideways in her chair, head resting on Richie's shoulder behind her, and her feet spilling over into Mike's lap. She was forever thankful when he draped part of his blanket over her ankles.

She'd only just woken up a few hours ago, but recent events seemed to be taking a big toll on her as she fell back to sleep, thinking about the steady beep of Will's heart monitor.

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LIsa: :)? Assuming that's good, thanks! XD

JustCrazy: Ahhhh, I'm screaming you guessed it! Honestly, it probably wasn't all that hard. After this chapter, most of all your questions about Ross's nosebleeds should be answered. That's not to end any theories you have about it, in fact I'd still like to hear what you think! We definitely aren't done with Ross's

nosebleeds. If you have any other questions i'd be happy to answer them! (Most of them, lol)

A/N: Thanks to all those who reviewed! This is a chapter I'm sure some people have been anticipating; the explanation of Ross's nosebleeds. Hopefully this answers most of your questions, but keep in mind that we aren't done with her problem quite yet, and we only know what Dr. Owens has told us/knows. Soooooooo, lemme know what you think, even if it's just a smiley face (wink wink). Again, sorry for any errors and all that jazz(i feel like this chapter is weirdly short, so sorry), and i hope you enjoyed!

-blockthewriter

10. Chapter 10

They sat in a big office room, the kind with the long tables surrounded by chairs, where they held all kids of special meetings. Ross guessed that in some sense, this was a special meeting. The long table was covered in pictures of the Byers household, specifically ones of Will's drawing. They'd captured all the routes and turned it into one giant map. Looking at it now, Ross thought it was kind of impressive.

"Sam, this is ludicrous," one of the doctors spoke up. Ross gave the man a glare. Ever since they'd gotten into the room, and the other doctors and scientists came in, *that* specific doctor had no trouble at all with making absurd comments. She wasn't even sure what half of them were about, but the way he said it and the look on his face was enough to make Ross annoyed with him.

"Just give him a moment, okay?" Owens said, waving the other man off. Ross looked to Will again, pulling her blanket tight around her. She was standing between Joyce and Hopper, leaning agaisnt the window behind her. Will was sitting at the table, with Mike and Richie on either side of him.

"We don't have time-"

"Hey, jackass," Hopper said from next to her," why don't you do us all a favor and shut up, okay?" When the man frowned, but said nothing, Ross snorted rather loudly. Before any heads could turn towards her, Will stood from his spot. He walked around Richie's chair, and Owens held an arm out in front of the other men, prompting them to move back. Joyce stepped forward, going to examine the pictures laid out.

Ross trained her eyes on Will, who rounded the edge of the table. She wasn't entirely sure what he was supposed to even be looking for. She'd been sleeping when Hopper shook her awake, telling her they were taking a trip to another room real quick. While reluctant to move at all, Ross followed after Mike gave her his blanket as well. Now she had three.

Will pressed a thin finger to a cluster of photos. "That's it."

Hopper moved from Ross's side to get a closer look.

"That's what?" Owens asked. "What's-what's there, Will?"

"I don't know," Will confessed shaking his head. "I just know he doesn't want me to see there. I think it's important."

Ross was curled back up in her chair in room when Will said it.

"I'm sorry."

She sat up, leaning forward. "What?"

"What? What do you mean, sweetie?" Joyce asked with concern. Will looked at his mom, shuddering. Ross planted her feet on the floor. What had happened? What did Will do? She glanced to Richie and Mike, who both looked just as confused as she was. Their expressions were nearly identical.

"He made me do it," Will said. It sounded like he was going to cry.

"Who?" Joyce asked, standing up. She planted her hands on either side of him. "Who made you do what?"

"I told you," Will said. "They upset him."

Ross thought hard. She had obviously missed that part. Who had upset the shadow monster? What had they done?

"They shouldn't have done that. They shouldn't have upset him."

Mike sat up, staring at Will with wide eyes. "The spy."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Richie asked.

"Isn't Will the spy?" Ross asked.

Will began to cry. Then she understood.

"The spy!" Mike shot out of his chair, heading for the door. Bob was quick to follow. Richie jumped up too, but waited as Ross untangled herself from the blanket.

"What going on?"

"Will wasn't a spy for us," Ross worked out hurriedly, racing after Mike.

Down the hall, Mike ran into the guards at the foor. "I need to get through!" he shouted. "It's a trap!" Bob quickly wrapped his arms around him, pulling him back.

"It's a trap!" Mike shouted, trying to pull away. "I need to warn them! It's a trap!"

Ross sprinted past Bob, who tried to reach out an arm to catch her. She evaded his grip and slammed herself into one of the gaurds.

"Let us through!" she yelled, jumping up, trying to push the man away. Richie was already fighting agaisnt the other gaurd, trying to get through.

"Move outta the fucking way!" Richie shouted.

"We have to warn them!" Mike yelled, just as Bob pushed him agaisnt the wall. Suddenly, an alarm began to blare. The gaurds faltered, releasing their holds on Richie and Ross.

"What the hell?" Bob said.

"We're too late," Mike said.

"What?"

"We're too late!"

Mike pushed away from Bob and started back towards the room, Ross, Richie, and Bob hot on his heels.

"What's going on?" Joyce asked.

"We're under attack," Mike said. He went over to the counter and snatched up a needle. "We need to make Will sleep."

"What?" Joyce exclaimed.

Richie stepped forward. "He's a spy. If he knows where we are, so does the shadow monster."

Will sat up. "He's lying!" he exclaimed.

"He killed those soldiers," Mike said," he'll kill us, too!"

"He's lying!" Will shouted. "He's lying, he's lying! He's lying!"

Ross watched as Will thrashed violently, accusing them of lying. Then she heard the sound of guns going off.

"Those are gunshots!" Bob exclaimed, turning around.

Will continued to shout.

"Okay, Will, Will, listen, listen," Joyce yelled, trying to quiet her son. "Do you know who I am?"

Will paused. Ross took a step towards the door, grabbing the handle.

"Do you know who I am?"

"You're...you're...you're Mom," Will said. There was a long silence, and Ross turned back to watch.

"Hold him down," Joyce told Bob.

"No! No!" Will began to shout. "Let go! No! No! Let me go!"

Bob held Will down, and Richie jumped in to hold his kicking feet. Joyce snatched the needle from Mike and apoligized to Will. Will shouted and kicked, trying his hardest to get free. Mike covered his ears, and Ross stepped forward and grabbed one of his arms. She was scared.

The door shot open, and Ross spun to see Hopper and Owens within the frame. They stared at the scene for a moment, before a loud growling came from down the hall. Ross stepped towards the door, peering around Hopper and Owens. The double doors at the end of the hall began to shake and bust apart.

"What is that?"

"We gotta go," Hopper said. "We gotta go." He turned and slid past Ross, heading for Will. He took out the boys IV and blundled him into his arms, then turned back and fled out the doors. Joyce grabbed more vials of the stuff used to knock Will out, and took off after him. Mike went next, followed by Bob, and then Owens rushed Ross and Richie out of the room.

They ran down the halls, sirens blaring, and Ross heard people scream. In front of them, a door busted open, and a man came flying out of the room with some sort of creature on top of him. They stopped. Behind them, a gaurd was firing his gun.

"Go!" Ross was pulled into the next room, and Owens shut the door, locking it behind them all.

"What the fuck was that thing?" Richie exclaimed. Hopper set Will down on the desk, and Bob turned towards the wall. Ross followed her gaze.

"Oh, my god," Bob breathed out.

There were surveillance videos, showing different halls and rooms. In each on there was some creature prowling about. Dead people lay on the ground. Some were being killed.

The creatures looked startling familiar, and knew exactly why. Despite running around on four legs, they had an uncanny resemblance to a demogorgan. That thought alone had Ross shaking, but to see them ripping through human bodies like they were afternoon snacks?

The lights flickered.

"Shit," Ross muttered.

They were swept into total darkness.

"Okay, this is us," Owens said, circling a space on the map, "and this is the nearest exit." He tapped the paper and straightened up. "But

even if we somehow make it there, there's no way out."

Richie threw his hands in the air. "Great. That's fucking great. I'm gonna die in some god damned, creepy ass lab in the middle of fucking no where."

Hopper turned and held out a hand, shaking his head. "No, no. No one's gonna die." he turned back to Owens. "What do you mean?"

"The locks are fail secure," the doctor explained.

"Fail secure?" Joyce question.

"If there's a power outage, the building goes on full lockdown," Owens said.

"Can it be unlocked remotely?" Bob asked.

"With a computer, sure," Owens agreed. "But somebody's gotta reset the breakers."

"Where are the breakers?" Hopper asked.

"Breakers are in the basement," Owens told him, leaning back over the map. "Three floors down."

Hopper snatched up the map and spun around.

"Hey, where are you going?" Bob asked.

"To reset the breakers."

"Okay, then what?"

"Then we get the hell out of here," Hopper said.

"No, then the power comes back on," Bob said.

"So then we can see the monsters as they kill us," Richie said. Mike elbowed him.

"If you wanna unlock the doors," Bob said, ignoring his comment, "you have to completely reboot the computer system, and then

override the security codes with a manual input."

"What does that even mean?" Ross asked.

"Fine," Hopper said. "How do I do that?"

"You can't!" Bob exclaimed. "Not unless you know BASIC."

"Basic what?" Ross said loudly. "What are you talking about?"

"I don't know what that means," Hopper stressed.

"It's a computer programming language," Mike spoke up.

"Alright," Hopper said, taking a step forward. "Teach it to me,"

Bob scoffed. "Shall I teach you French while I'm at it, Jim? How about a little German?"

"Now is not the time to start being sarcastic, Bob," Ross said on impulse. The situation was stressing her out, which practically cancelled any filter between her brain and her mouth.

"How about you, Doc?" Bob asked, turning to look at Owens. "You speak BASIC?"

"No," Owens sighed.

Bob scoffed again. "Okay. I got this." He turned to Hopper. "I got this."

"No," Joyce said. "Bob." She shook her head and stepped forward.

"It's okay," Bob reassured her, pulling her into a hug. "It's gonna be okay. Remember, Bob Newby, superhero."

Ross had sat herself down on the floor agaisnt the wall, hugging herself. She'd left her blankets back in Will's room, and now she was cold again. Richie sat down on the other side of her. He rubbed his eyes from beneath his glasses and looked over at her.

"Hey," he whispered.

"Hey," she said back. There was a bit of silence before she said, "This is bad."

"Yeah, it is," Richie agreed. "Although in some fucked up way, it's almost funny." This caught Ross's attention.

"How?" she asked curiously, drawing her legs up to her chest.

"My parents," Richie started. "They moved us here to keep away from all the shit happening in Derry. Only to come here and find out things aren't much different."

"I guess. But is it, really?" Ross asked. "I mean, in Derry it was probably a serial killer or some shit. Here, it's monsters, and evil scientists, and girls with super powers. It's sounds like it's straight out of comic book."

Richie shook his head, giving a dry chuckle. Ross looked at him, furrowing her eyebrows.

"You saw them, didn't you?" she asked quietly. "The person that kidnapped the kids?" Ross imagined Richie in his house, alone, yet not alone at the same time. The killer was there, trying to get him, but Richie managed to escape with his life. Maybe that's where that scar on his hand came from. Ross reached down between them and grabbed it, intertwining her fingers with his.

"Yeah," he breathed out. "Me and my friends did. It nearly got us, too."

Suddenly, the light flickered on. The video cameras on the wall lit back up, and in one of them they could see Bob knelt next to a panel of buttons, knobs, and switches.

"He made it," Mike said.

Richie climbed to his feet, pulling Ross up with him. He let go of her hand and went to stand in front of the screens.

But Ross was thinking about what he'd said. *It nearly got us, too.* He'd said it. Whatever had taken those kids wasn't human.

"Okay, Bob, can you hear us?" Owens said into the mic. Ross held her breath.

"*Loud and clear, Doc. Can you hear me back?"*

"Yeah, we hear you alright."

Joyce let out a sigh of relief, and Ross smiled.

"*All right, give me a minute,"* Bob told them. For a few seconds all they heard was clicking, the sound of Bob typing away on the keyboard. "*Open sesame."*

There was a loud beep over the intercom.

"It's open," Owens clarified.

"*Okay,"* they heard Bob mutter. "*Easy-peasy."*

"Son of bitch did it," Hopper said, smiling.

"*Right, I'll meet you outside,"* Bob told them.

They saw Bob get up from the computer over the screens. "Nice job," Owens congratulated. Suddenly, they heard a roar from within the building. "Hold on a second, Chief."

"What's wrong?" Hopper asked, stepping up behind him. Owens pointed to one of the screen. It showed a stairwell, and one of the creatures appeared.

"West stairwell's not clear anymore."

"*What's going on?"* Bob asked.

"We got some company."

"*Where?"*

"The west stairwell," Owens told him.

"*I got an idea."*

Back on the screen Bob was in, he returned to the computer and began typing.

"What's he doing?" Ross asked, taking a step closer. Her attention was drawn to another screen as the sprinkler on the ceiling kicked on. On the screen below, the creature looked up, before bounding up the stairs. Bob had turned on the sprinklers in one hall to attract the monster, clearing the stairwell.

"Okay," Owens said, "Okay, that worked. Now get out of there. Go! Go!"

Hopper turned to the desk and hoisted a still unconscious Will onto his shoulder. Owens noticed and got out of his chair. "Wait a second, Chief?"

"What?" Hopper asked, turning back around.

"Take this." Owens held up a walkie talkie. Hopper obligied.

"What are you doing?"

"Any more surprises, I'll let you know," Owens told him. "Go. Go!"

Hopper sighed and grabbed the handle of the gun he had slung across him, and nodded.

"Alright, let's go," he said, turning towards Ross and the boys. He nodded towards the door, which Richie opened for him.

"Wait," Ross said. "We're leaving you?" She looked to Owens, concern written across her face.

"I'll be fine, Roslyn," Owens assured her. "Now, go."

Mike grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the room with him. "Wait, no! We can't leave him."

Hopper hushed her, slowly walking down the hall. Mike tugged her along, with Richie and Joyce just behind them. Hopper led them down hallways and turns, and they made it out to the main lobby.

Mike broke into a jog towards the door, dragging Ross along with him. Just then, her head began to hurt.

"Fuck!" she exclaimed, reaching for her nose. "Now is not the time!" Mike glanced back at her, beginning to slow down. Ross sped up, shaking her head.

"Keep going," she told him, nodding towards the doors. Richie pulled ahead of them and shoved the doors open, holding it for them and Hopper.

Immediately they pulled to the side, and Hopper leaned over towards Mike. The Wheeler boy let go of her hand and held out his arms, allowing Hopper to pass Will onto him. Ross bent over and dropped her hand from her nose, wincing as blood dribbled onto the cement below.

"Shit," Richie said, scrunching his face up in disgust. "That's nasty. Like Eddie's mom's vagina."

"Thanks," Ross said sarcastically, rolling her eyes, wondering why he felt the need to mention Eddie's mom's vagina. It wasn't the first time he'd done it. The blood began to slow down, so she straightened up and wiped her nose, probably smearing blood across her face. She was too distracted to care. She wiped her hands on her hospital gown. Suddenly, she heard a scream.

Ross whipped around back towards the doors. "Joyce!" Hopper ran inside, and Ross went to follow.

She'd made it towards the doors, and was about to push them open before Richie grabbed her arms. But she'd already seen it.

Bob. He was on the ground, one of those *things* on top of him. Hopper shot at it a few times before a pair of wooden double doors fell down. Their were two more. But Ross looked back towards Bob, fighting agaisnt Richie's hold.

"No!" she shouted. "Bob!" She screamed as the creature bit down on his chest.

Richie began to drag her back, away from the doors and Hopper

headed their way, pulling a screaming Joyce along with him. He pulled them out of the doors and closed them.

"What happened?" Mike shouted, supporting Will. The creatures began to throw themselves at the glass doors, which began to crack.

"That fucking thing just ate him!" Richie shouted. "Holy fuck!" He released his grip on Ross just to grab her hand, squeezing it tight.

"He's gone!" Hopper was shouting to Joyce. "He's gone!"

And he was. There was no way Bob had survived that. Ross wanted to cry.

She heard a car honking and turned as a vehicle stopped ahead of them.

"Come on!" it was Jonathan. "Get in!"

Hopper grabbed Will from Mike and rushed to the car, setting him into the backseat. Joyce went in next, followed by Mike.

"There's not enough room!" Richie exclaimed. Hopper shut the door and told Jonathan to drive.

"Wait, what?" Mike asked from inside, turning to look out the window. But they were already driving away. Hopper grabbed Ross and Richie by the arms and pulled them along.

"My truck! Go!"

The broke into a sprint towards the police truck, and all piled in, Hopper in the drivers seat and Ross and Richie sharing the passenger's side. He started the truck and immediately took after Jonathan. Ross held onto the dash as they swerved a corner.

"Holy shit!" Richie exclaimed.

They were approaching the gate, and Ross noticed the people standing around it.

"My god," she said, leaning forward. "Is that Steve?"

"Who the fuck is Steve?" Richie asked.

"Steve Harrington!"

Hopper slammed on the breaks, nearly sending Ross and Richie through the wind shield. "In the back," he told them, rolling down the window. He leaned over, looking go the group of kids standing outside. "Let's go."

Steve lunged for the car door, and Ross turned and started shoving Richie into the back.

"Go, go!" she shouted, moving quickly as Max climbed in behind to her.

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JustCrazy: Thanks for the review! You have no idea how encouraging it is to get feedback, i'm forever greatful! Interesting theory, too! I love to see how think. As for her nosebleeds, we won't get much more information on them in this story. I've kinda already got a basis for how i'm going to lay it out in season 3, but of course I'll have to wait till the season actually comes out to set things stone. I'm very away that the release date for S3 is a year away(i think?), but on the brightside that gives me more time to get creative and look over what I have planned, because it's quite a mess at the moment. Too many places I could take things.

candy95: thanks for the review! Can't thank you enough for your support for the story! As for Ross's nosebleeds, there's definetly no need to be worried, at least not until S3 comes out and I get to writing on that. As for my theory, I laid it out that the Mind Flayer kinda of invested(idk if that's the right word) himself into Will while he was in the Upside Down. The Mind Flayer also got to Ross, but because she was in the Upside Down for a much shorter time compared to Will, it couldn't root itself into her as well. When Ross gets her first nosebleed it kinda of signifies the Mind Flayer trying to actively possess Will(bc that night the

Flayer's arms, if you could call them that, chased Will while trick-or-treating). It shows that Mind Flayer still has a hold in her, albeit as small at it is, so whenever the Flayer does something/feels something, it effects Ross with nosebleeds rather than episodes or possesion. It's a lot, and probably a bit confusing, but I hope that kinda of explains things.

A/N: 10th chapter, wow! Remember that time I never planned on publishing this? Boy was i wild. Honestly, the only reason I actually started writing this was bc I got the idea and wanted to read it. So i wrote it so I could, how convenient. Anyways, I hope you enjoy this chapter. I'd like to put out there that I'm planning on doing a prequel to this story, set in S1. Of course, that means there'll be no Richie or Max, but I want to give you guys(and myself) enough content until S3 comes out. Would you guys like a prequel? Please let me know! Sorry for any grammatical/spelling mistakes, while I like writing i kinda really hate the subject of english, and so it's rather hard for me to edit things(dont know if that makes sense). Anyhow, I reallly hope you enjoy the chapter, AND the rest of the week. I'm in crazy good mood, wow.

- blockthewriter

11. Chapter 11

Ross sat on the kitchen counter of the Byers household, trying to scrub the blood off of her hands. Richie was standing next to her, while Max, Mike, and Lucas sat at the table, with Dustin leaning against it. After the lab, they quickly went back to Will's house, where Hopper contacted authorities. Richie had pointed out that he *was* the authorities but had been ignored. Hopper was speaking with them at that very moment, clearly annoyed.

"I don't know how many people are left alive!" the police officer was saying in a hard tone. "I am the police! Chief Jim Hopper!"

Ross sighed, dropping her hands down into her lap. Richie glanced at her, before looking back forward and muttering," You look like shit."

"Thanks," Ross drawled. Steve came in from the other room and stood on her other side. She was still curious as to why he was with them, or even with the others in the first place. They'd already explained what had happened in the junkyard, but Dustin never got around to explaining how he'd gotten the senior's help in the first place.

"Yes," Hopper continued on the phone. "The number that I gave you, yes. 6767. I will be here." He hung up, and turned back to face them all.

"They didn't believe you, did they?" Dustin asked.

"We'll see."

Ross continued to scrub at her hands. She had no doubt in her mind that they wouldn't believe them. It was crazy. Killer monsters who stormed a lab and ate everyone in it? Absolutely insane.

"We'll see?" Mike repeated. "We can't just sit here while those things are loose!"

"We stay here," Hopper said sternly. "And we wait for help." He turned and walked into the next room.

Ross slid off the counter top, wiping the rag across her lips once more

and turning to Richie. "Is it gone?" she asked.

He looked her up and down before nodding. "Yeah. But what are you gonna do about that?" He pointed a finger at the bloody hospital gown.

Ross furrowed her eyebrows. "I don't know," she sighed. Mike stood up from the table, catching her attention. He walked to the pile of puzzles, before picking up the blue cube from the top.

Bob. He'd died for them. If it wasn't for him, they wouldn't have made it out of that building. Ross sighed deeply, clenching her fists.

"Did you know that Bob was the original founder of Hawkins AV?" Mike asked.

"Really?" Lucas asked. Mike turned, holding the cube with one hand, giving a small smile.

"He petitioned the school to start it and everything," Mike explained. "Then he had a fund-raiser for equipment." He walked back towards them.

"Mr. Clarke learned everything from him. Pretty awesome, right?"

"Yeah," Lucas and Dustin agreed. Mike set the cube down on the table.

"We can't let him die in vain," he told them. Ross nodded.

"We can't," she agreed.

"Well, what do you want to do, Mike?" Dustin asked loudly. "Alright, the Chief's right on this. We can't stop those demodogs on our own."

"Demodogs?" Max asked.

Dustin looked at her like it was obvious. "Demogorgon. Dogs. Demodogs. It's-it's like a compound." Ross rolled her eyes. "It's like a play on words-"

"Okay," Max said, stopping Dustin in his tracks. He faltered, looking

back at the table top.

"I mean, when it was just Dart, maybe," he continued.

"But there's an army now," Lucas said.

"Who gives a shit," Richie said, stepping up next to the table. "Doesn't mean we can't try."

"It's suicide," Dustin argued.

"His army," Mike said. Ross raised an eyebrow.

"What do you mean?" Steve asked.

"His army," Mike repeated.

"Yeah, we got that part Nancy Drew," Richie said, waving him along. "Instead of repeating, mind explaining?"

"Maybe if we stop him," Mike went on, "we can stop his army, too."

"Take out the leader and the whole team crumbles," Ross said, understanding what Mike was on to. The Wheeler boy turned down the hall towards Will's room, and Ross and the others were quick to follow.

He snatched up Will's drawing of the shadow monster, and held it up for everyone to see.

"The shadow monster," Dustin noted.

"It got Will that day on the feild," Mike explained. "The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him."

"And so this virus," Max said. "It's connecting him to the tunnels?"

"To the tunnels, to the monsters," Richie said.

"To the Upside Down, everything," Mike finished.

"Whoa, whoa," Steve said, holding up his hands. "Slow down, slow down."

"Okay, so, the shadow monster's inside everything," Mike said. "And if the vines feel something like pain-"

"-Will does, too," Ross said.

"And so does Dart," Lucas added.

"Yeah. It's like what Mr. Clarke taught us," Mike said. Ross furrowed her eyebrows.

"Shit, really?" She asked. He nodded. "I've gotta start paying attention in class."

"It's a hive mind," Richie said. Ross turned towards him, surprised. He never striked her as one to pay attention.

"Hive mind?" Steve questioned.

"A collective consciousness," Dustin said. "It's a super organism."

"And this is the thing that controls everything," Mike said, tapping the paper. "It's the brain."

"Like the Mind Flayer," Dustin said.

Lucas snapped his fingers, and pointed at Dustin.

"The what?" Max and Steve asked.

"What the fuck is a Mind Flayer?" Richie asked. Ross smirked.

"Get ready to be educated."

Dustin set the book on the table, and looked up.

"The Mind Flayer," he said.

"What the hell is that?" Hopper asked.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension," Dustin started. "It's so ancient that it doesn't even know it's true home. Okay, it enslaves other races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its

highly-developed psionic powers."

"Oh my god," Hopper said, rolling his eyes. "None of this is real. This is a kids' game."

"No," Dustin corrected. "It's a manual. And it's not for kids. And unless you know something that we don't, this is the best metaphor-"

"Analogy," Lucas corrected. Ross looked over to him, raising an eyebrow.

"Seriously?" Richie asked.

"Analogy? That's what you're worried about?" Dustin questioned.

"Whatever," Ross said, pointing to the book. "It's the best analogy for understanding whatever the hell this thing is."

"Okay," Nancy said, holding up her hands. "So this mind flamer thing-"

"Flayer," Dustin corrected. "Mind Flayer."

"Guys," Ross stressed, rolling her eyes. "Now is not the time for corrections."

Nancy sighed. "What does it want?"

Dustin paused. "To conquer us, basically. Ya know, it believes it's the master race."

"That's promising," Richie noted.

"Oh, like-like the Germans?" Steve said, pointing to the page.

Ross frowned, looking at Steve with confusion.

"Uh, the Nazis?" Dustin asked. Steve frowned, before nodding.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, the Nazis."

"Uh-If the Nazis were from another dimension, totally," Dustin said. "Uh, it views other races, like us, as inferior to itself."

"It wants to spread, take over other dimensions," Mike explained.

"We are talking about the destruction of our world as we know it," Lucas said.

"That's great," Steve said sarcastically. "That's great. That's really great. Jesus!"

"Okay," Nancy said, picking up the book," so if this thing is like a brain that's controlling everything, then if we kill it..."

"We kill everything it controls," Mike said.

"We win," Dustin said.

"Hopefully," Ross said.

"Theoretically," Lucas added.

"Great, so how do you kill this thing?" Hopper asked, taking the book from Nancy. "Shoot if with fireballs or something?"

"No," Dustin chuckled. "No, no fire-no fireballs. Uh, you summon an undead army, uh, because...because zombies, ya know, they don't have brains, and the mind flayer, it-it-it likes brains."

"Jesus christ," Richie groaned.

"It's just a game," Dustin said. "It's a game."

"What the hell are we doing here?" Hopper asked, throwing the book down on the table.

"I thought we were waiting for your military back up," Dustin challenged.

"We are!"

"Even if they come, how are they gonna stop this?" Mike asked. "You can't just shoot it with guns."

"I don't suppose they've got an army of zombies in their backyard," Ross said sarcastically.

"You don't know that!" Hopper said to Mike, ignoring Ross's comment. "We don't know anything!"

"We know it's already killed everybody in that lab," Mike said.

"We know the monsters are gonna molt again," Lucas said.

"Which mean we know that we won't just be dealing with Demodogs," Ross added. "We'll be fucking with demogorgons!"

"We know that it's only a matter of time before those tunnels reach this town," Dustin said.

"They're right."

Ross turned to see Joyce standing in the hall. She was still wearing the scrubs from the lab. "We have to kill it. I *want* to kill it."

"Me, too," Hopper said, approaching her. "Me, too, Joyce, okay? But how do we do that? We don't exactly know what we're dealing with here."

"No," Mike said. "But he does."

Ross looked over to Will, still sleeping on the couch.

"If anyone knows how to destroy this thing," Mike continued, walking into the living room. "It's Will."

"He's connected to it," Ross agreed, following him.

"He'll know it's weakness," Mike said.

"I thought we couldn't trust him anymore," Max said. "That he's a spy for the Mind Flayer now."

"Yeah," Mike said, "but he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is."

Ross looked to Mike. She could practically see the gears turning in his head. He had a plan.

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They all quickly set to work. Hopper was to clear the shed, Nancy and Steve would start putting up tarps on the walls, Dustin and Lucas would scour the trash for spare paper or covers, Mike would look for ammonia, Max would disguise the chairs, Jonathan and Joyce would get wires to secure Will, all while and Richie and Ross were looking for all the duct tape and staples they could find.

They were in the living room digging through cupboards and drawers. All Ross had succeeded in finding were a few measly Scotch Tape dispensers. She was sorting through a junk drawer when Richie turned to her.

"Ross?"

"Hmm?" she hummed, not looking away from the drawer. She couldn't possible think of what he had to ask her about, even though there were a *thousand* things to ask about.

"What's the Upside Down like?"

Ross paused, thumbing the cap of the permanent marker in her hand.

"What's it like?"

"Yeah," he said. "Were you scared?"

Ross gave a dry laugh, slumping back to the floor, but continued to look through the drawer. "Yeah, I was scared," she said, nodding.

"What was it like?" he asked again. Ross glanced at him. He was sitting on the floor a few feet away, two rolls of duct tape in his hands, and staring at her. She looked away.

"It was cold," she said. "And dark. And there were these...vines everywhere. On the walls, and floors, and the ceiling. And it was really quiet, too."

"Did you see the thing? The demogorgon?"

Ross shook her head. She hadn't seen the demogorgon, but she had seen something else. That creature, or person, with blue eyes and a white face. "No, I didn't. I just wandered for hours, looking for

someone else. Will, mainly."

She sighed, shrugging. She wouldn't tell him about the eyes. They had enough to worry about as it was, and Richie didn't need to be asking more questions.

"I got lost in the forest, and I *almost* saw the demogorgon," she said.

"And you found that hole and crawled out," Richie finished. When they told him everything that happened, Ross had explained how she'd left the Upside Down. She nodded.

"That's...crazy," he muttered. "You were in there for half a day?"

She nodded, looking up to meet his eyes. "Yeah. But Will was in there for a week."

After Richie and Ross gathered all the supplied they could find, they went out to the shed and distributed them to everyone. They all started taping and stapling tarps, paper, sheets, cardboard, and nearly just any type of cover they could find. They covered the ground, and the floor, and they put up two headlamps. Lucas plugged them in as Jonathan brought in Will and tied him to the chair. Ross sighed, rubbing her face as the others left the room. All that remained was Jonathan, Ross, Joyce, Mike, and Hopper.

"All right, you ready?" Hopper asked Joyce.

"Yeah," she breathed out shakily, nodding slightly. Ross handed Hopper the jug of ammonia, and he started to shake it, approaching Will. Ross crossed her arms, watching as he screwed off the cap, doused a cotton ball with it, and held it beneath Will's nose.

Will gasped, jerking awake with wide eyes. Ross furrowed her eyebrows, taking a step closer. His eyes were no longer their usual bluish green, they were a deep brown. Why had his eyes changed colors? Will glanced around, grunting as he pulled on his restraints.

"What?" he asked, turning to Hopper as he took a step forward. "What is this?"

No one said anything, and he jerked a bit more. "What-what is this? Why am I tied up?"

Ross rubbed her arm, trying to rid of the sudden goosebumps she'd gotten. She was still dressed in the blood stained hospital gown, with the shorts and tanktop underneath, and socks on her feet.

Joyce moved forward and kneeled in front of her son, grabbing his arms. "Will, we just wanna talk to you," she told him. "We're not gonna hurt you."

"Where am I?" he asked loudly, looking up from his mom. Hopper knelt beside him, grabbing the back of the chair. He held up a peice of paper Ross recognized to be Will's drawing of the shadow monster. He shook it lightly.

"You recognize this?" he shook it again. "Do you recognize this?"

Will shook his head.

"Hey," Joyce said softly. "We wanna help you. But to do that, we have to understand how to kill it."

"Why am I tied up?" Will shouted. Joyce flinched, and Ross grabbed Jonathan's arm.

"Why am I tied up?" Will shouted again, leaning forward into his mom's face. "Why am I tied up? Why am I tied up?""

"Hey," Hopper yelled, grabbing Will's shoulder and pushing him back.

"Why am I tied up?" Will continued, thrashing in his chair. "Why am I tied up?"

The lights began to flicker, and Ross tightened her grip, taking a step closer to the older boy.

"Let me go!" Will screamed. "Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!"

Ross winced, grabbing the side of her head as it began to hurt. There, she felt something wet in her ears.

Blood.

She let go of Jonathan and brought a hand to her nose, felt the crimson liquid and shook her head. Internally she willed it to stop, knowing it wouldn't work. Ross settled for wiping her nose and focusing on Will. They had bigger problems then nosebleeds.

She focused back on Will, who was still screaming, and she felt panic and fear rise in her chest. What if they couldn't help him? What if he never got better? Ross blinked away her tears, trying furiously to not think about anything that wasn't Will getting better. Because he *would* get better. He was one of Ross's best friends, and there was no way she would let him live the rest of his life like this.

"Let me go!" Will shouted, beginning to falter. "Let me go!" The lights stopped flickering, and Will slumped forward, breathing heavily. Ross took a deep breath, using her clean hand to wipe at her eyes.

Joyce got up from the ground and sat in the other chair. "Do you know what March 22nd is?"

Will only stared.

"It's your birthday," she continued. "*You're* birthday. When you turned eight, I gave you that huge box of crayons. Do you remember that?"

Ross sighed. She remembered Will's eighth birthday. It had been a few months after Ross's mom had left. Her dad had been spending all their money on alcohol, so she couldn't get Will a present. The boys had gotten him cool toys, and all she managed was a rock. It was smooth, and she'd found it in a stream near her house. She brought it home and carved Will's name into with a pocket knife she found lying around, and gave it to him. He told her he loved it, although she knew he was secretly disappointed. However he kept it, and probably still had it to this day.

"It was 120 colors," Joyce continued. "And all your friends, they got you *Star Wars* toys, but all you wanted to do was draw with all your new colors. And you drew this big spaceship, but it wasn't from a movie. It-it was your spaceship. A rainbow ship is what you called it. And you must have used every color in the box." Joyce told Will

about how she took it to her work and hung it up, showing and telling everyone what Will had done. She said he was embarrased, but she was so proud.

Beside her, Jonathan let out a shaky breath. "Do you remember the day dad left?" Will turned to him, and Jonathan stepped forward, kneeling beside Joyce.

"We stayed up all night building Castle Byers, just the way you drew it. And it took so long because you were so bad at hammering. You missed the nail everytime. And then is started raining, but we stayed out there anyway. We were both sick for like a week after that. But we just had to finish it, didn't we?"

Ross sighed, glancing towards the ground.

And she saw it.

Will was tapping his fingers to one of the legs of his chair.

"We just had to," Jonathan finished.

"Do you remember the first day that we met?" Mike asked. Ross gave him a quick glance, but looked back to Will's hand. Had he been tapping the whole time?

"It was-It was the first day of Kindergarten. I knew nobody. I had no friends and I just felt so alone and so scared, but...I saw you on the swings and you were alone, too. You were just swinging by yourself. And I just walked up to you and...I asked.

"I asked if you wanted to be my friend. And you said yes. You said yes."

It was a rhythm. He was tapping a rhythm. Why?

"It was the best thing I've ever done."

Joyce leaned forward. "Will, baby...if you're in there, just please...please talk to us."

The tapping became more frantic.

"Please, honey, please, can you do that for me? Please. I love you so much."

Will let out a shaky breath. "Let me go."

Ross stepped forward and nudged Hopper, holding up a pale finger towards Will.

He was tapping Morse Code.

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Guest: Thanks for the review! I'm crazy glad to know that someone's interested in having a prequel. As for Ross and Richie, ship away! Happy to know your opinion on the story. I hope you enjoy the chapter!

A/N: This is one of my shorter chapters, I think. So, sorry about that. There's not much I have to say about this one. I've been super busy getting things ready for all the upcoming art shows i've got for school. Got 2nd place in photography at our last one, and 1st in the sidewalk chalk competion! (we killed it, lol). And, yay me, now I get to wake up at 5:30 to go to one that's 3 hours away. But yeah, so next week's chapter may be up late, bc we've got 2 shows that week. Anyway, sorry for an errors in spelling or grammar, and I really hope you like the chapter!

-blockthewriter

12. Chapter 12

They hurried back into the house, and the others all gathered at their arrival. Hopper snatched up a pen and paper and sat at the table.

"You're bleeding again," Max said, frowning at Ross. Ross shook her head, leaning agaisnt the table to watch what Hopper was doing.

"What happened?" Dustin asked.

"I think he's talking," Hopper explained," Just not with words." Ross watched as he wrote out the rhythm Will'd been tapping, and then began deciphering the letters.

"What is that?" Steve asked, leaning over his shoulder.

"Morse code," all of the kids said.

"H-E-R-E," Hopper read off from the sheet of paper.

"Here."

Ross sighed, rubbing her forehead.

"Will's still in there," Hopper said. "He's talking to us."

They formed a plan. Hopper, Jonathan, Joyce, and Mike would go back into the shed to continue talking to Will. One of them would have a Walkie Talkie, and would relay Will's tapping back to everyone in the kitchen, where they would draw it out and write down the letters.

Ross would've gone back into the shed, but Hopper told her to stay inside. Something about her nosebleeds reacting when Will got worked up.

So they sat in the kitchen now, all waiting for the signal to come over the walkie talkie. Dustin, Max, and Lucas were huddled around the radio, and Ross and Richie were on the other side of the table. Richie was currently trying to scrub the trails of blood from the side of her

head, where it'd leaked from her ear. She already managed to clean up her nose. Steve and Nancy sat on either side of them, Nancy with a crayon and paper to write down the letters

Richie paused as the radio beeped a few times. "Dash, dot, dash, dot," they all said aloud. Dustin wrote it down, while Lucas scoured the small guide for the letter.

"Okay, I got it," he said, pointing to it.

"C," Lucas and Max said.

Nancy quickly wrote it down.

They continued to wait for the beeps, writing down the letters as they came in, until it eventually formed out two words. They all got up and gathered behind Nancy as she held up the paper.

"Close Gate," they read.

Suddenly, the phone began to ring.

Dustin hurried over, picked up the phone, and slammed it back into the receiver. A second later, it started ringing again.

He went to grab it again, but Nancy beat him to it, snatching the phone mount and tearing it from the wall all together. Ross raised her eyebrows.

"Jesus," Richie muttered from beside her.

"Do you think he heard that?" Max asked in concern.

"It's just a phone," Steve reasoned. "It could be anywhere. Right?"

"I think so," Ross said, standing up. "I mean, hopefully."

"God dammit, we're all gonna fucking die!" Richie exclaimed, throwing the dirty rag onto the table.

"No one's dying," Nancy said, shaking her head.

They heard a loud roar from somewhere outside.

"Yeah?" Richie asked. "Tell that to them."

They all moved to the living room, eyes on the doors and windows.

"That's not good," Dustin said.

Ross raced to the windows, jumping onto the back of the couch to look through the glass. The other kids followed, and not a second later Mike came in and joined them.

"Hey! Get away from the windows!" Hopper demanded, entering through the kitchen with two guns in his hands.

They followed orders, and lined up agaisnt the opposite wall. Hopper took a quick glance through the glass and turned to Jonathan, holding up a rifle.

"Do you know how to use this?"

"What?" Jonathan asked.

"Can you use this?" Hopper asked frantically, shaking the weapon for emphasis.

"Um-"

"I can," Nancy said, stepping forward. Hopper tossed her the gun and she caught it, cocking it before holding it up. Hopper presumed the same stance, and Steve stepped in between them with his Nail Bat.

Lucas pulled his slingshot out of his back pocket, and Ross looked around for some sort of weapon. There were none. The closest thing to one was a candle stick, which Mike already held in his hands. So she settled for standing directly behind Lucas, and stared towards the door with bated breath.

"Where are they?" Max asked.

Ross could hear a low rumbling, which quickly turned into a roar on the right side of the house. They all turned towards the sound, and Richie grabbed Ross's elbow.

"What are they doing?" Nancy asked.

There were more growls and snarls at the front of the house, and they all turned again.

"Fucking shit," Richie muttered, tightening his grip on Ross. The monster outside continued to screech, until it stopped abruptly. Ross took a timid step forward, peering through the window. What happened?

Suddenly, a demodog came flying in through the window, shattering the glass and sliding across the floor. Ross screamed, as did everyone else, and someone grabbed the back of her hospital gown, pulling her back.

"What the fuck!" Richie exclaimed, and Ross reached out behind her to grab his arm.

The creature was completely limp, laying in an awkward angle ontop of some knocked over furniture. Hopper took a tentative step towards it, gun still up.

"Holy shit," Dustin said.

"Is it dead?" Max asked.

Hopper was directly in front of it, and Ross squeezed Richie wrist, wincing.

"He's gonna kick it."

And he did. He nudged it with his boot, checking to see if it would react in anyway at all. Slowly, he lowered his gun. Then the door creaked.

They all spun around, and the lock flipped by itself. Ross nearly choked. Hopper and Nancy held up their guns once more, Lucas and Steve, their weapons.

The sliding lock slid off, dropping to hang uselessly. Ross's hand slid down into Richie's and she squeezed. This couldn't be happening. The door swung opened, and everything slowed down.

Eleven.

And there she stood, dressed in jeans and a leather jacket, hair slicked back and some sort of make-up lining her brown eyes. Blood dripped out of her nose, and Ross's chest constricted.

She was squeezing Richie's hand so hard she wouldn't be surprised if she cut off circulation, because El was there. *She was finally back.*

Mike stepped forward, and all the memories hit her like a train. Mike and El sitting in his basement, riding his bike, sitting close together in the school gym, running from the demogorgon with locked hands, staring at eachother in a last goodbye as Eleven sacrificed herself, Mike radioing her every day since.

Ross loved Eleven and they were close. But Mike loved her in a different way, and they all knew it. They were closer, so close it had effected Mike drastically when she'd disappeared. He'd hoped every day for her return, and now he was finally getting it.

"Eleven."

They met in the middle, and she gasped, pulling him into a hug. "Mike."

Ross felt Richie squeeze her hand, and she turned to him for a moment. The question was burning in his eyes, and she gave a wordless nod.

"I never gave up on you," Mike told El, pulling away. "I called you every night. Every night for-"

"353 days," Eleven finished. Ross's eyes widened. She'd been listening. Mike had been right. "I heard."

"Why didn't you tell me you were there?" Mike asked. "That you were okay?"

"Because I wouldn't let her." Ross looked over to see Hopper take a step forward.

What?

"The hell is this?" he asked quietly, stepping directly in front of El. "Where you been?"

"Where have *you* been?" El asked back. Ross's eyebrows rose. Was that a coherent sentence?

Hopper pulled Eleven into a hug, just as Mike came to a realization. "You've been hiding her."

Ross glanced between the two. This would not be good.

"You've been hiding her this whole time!" Mike stepped forward and pushed Hopper.

"Hey!" Hopper exclaimed, turning around to grab Mike by the front of the shirt. "Let's talk. Alone." He quickly led Mike down the hall, and Ross let go of Richie's hand.

She rushed forward and eveloped El in a hug with some much force that she stumbled back.

"Roslyn," Eleven said, wrapping her arms around Ross. She felt the girl bury her face into her hair, and Ross hugged her even tighter.

"*God,* I missed you," she mumbled into El's jacket. "You've got no idea."

"I missed you, too," Eleven responded. Ross pulled away, holding El out at arms length, and gave a laugh.

"Shit, look at your hair," she said, eyeing the slicked back locks. What had it looked like before, when it wasn't done up? "It's long now."

Eleven gave her a small smile, "Bitchin'."

Ross laughed again, then noticed as Eleven's eyes shifted to something behind her. El frowned. Ross glanced behind her to see Richie standing a few feet away, adjusting his glasses.

"Mike?" El asked quietly, looking back to Ross.

"No," Ross told her, shaking her head. "Richie. Just looks like Mike."

She turned slightly, reaching out to grab Richie's wrist and pull him forward.

She considered something for a second, then said," he's basically Mike, but Rated R." Richie snorted, but El stared at her blankly. She realized that El probably didn't know what that even meant.

"Richie, this is El," she introduced, moving on before El could question it. "El, this is Richie." Eleven stared, and Richie stared back, before he gave her a small wave. El considered it for a moment before she gave a short nod.

Then Lucas and Dustin came up, both hugging her at the same time. Ross took a step back, wanting to give them room, and Richie followed, actually pulling her aside.

"That's really her?" he whispered, nodding towards her. Ross nodded.

"That's really her," she confirmed, giving a small laugh. "I can't believe it."

"Okay, but why did she show up all goth? And I thought she had no hair," he said. Ross rolled her eyes.

"For one, I don't rally cared *how* she showed up, just that she did. And second, *hair grows back, Richie."*

"I know, I know," Richie said, nodding. "It's just...I never thought I'd meet her. The way you guys talked to her made it seem like..."

"She was never coming back?" Ross asked. "That's what we'd thought. Clearly we were wrong."

"Clearly," Richie repeated, nodding. "And...and what if she acts weird around me?"

Ross raised an eyebrow.

"Because I look like Mike?"

She glanced back over to El, who was swiftly walking past Max's outstretched hand into Joyce' arm.

"She'll get used to it," Ross assured him. "She adjusts quickly, albeit in her own way, but still." She looked back to him, giving him a smile.

"I'm sure she'll like you."

"Yeah, okay," Steve butted in, stepping up next to the two. "But who is *she* anyway?" Ross and Richie looked up to the older boy, raising their eyebrows.

"You don't know?" Ross asked. Steve shook his head, giving them exasperated looks.

"Uh, no," he said.

Ross had figured that maybe Nancy had told Steve about Eleven. He knew about the demogorgon, and the two had started dating. Why hadn't she told him?

"It's a long story," Ross told him.

"Basically, she's from that lab and has freaky but cool mind powers," Richie said bluntly. Ross stepped on his toes.

She finally noticed the others heading to the kitchen, and went to follow.

"Do you think if we got you back there," Joyce was asking El, "that you could close it?"

The Gate. Eleven had been the one to open it in the first place. Wouldn't it only make sense that she could close it, too?

"It's not like it was before," Hopper said, letting lose a sigh. "It's grown. A lot. And, I mean, that's considering we can get in there. The place is crawling with those dogs."

"Demodogs," Dustin spoke up, turning to correct the older man.

"I'm sorry, what?" Hopper asked. Ross gave a loud groan, shaking her head.

"I said, uh, Demo-dogs," Dustin repeated. "Like demogorgon and dog. You put them together, it sounds pretty badass-"

"How is this important right now?"

"It's not," Dustin agreed, turning back to the table. "I'm sorry."

"I can do it," El spoke up, catching everyones attention. She was looking at Hopper, however, who shook his head.

"You're not hearing me."

"I'm hearing you," Eleven told him stubbornly. "I can do it."

"Even if El can, there's still another problem," Mike spoke up. "If the brain dies, the body dies."

"I thought that was the whole point," Max said.

"It is," Mike confirmed," but if we're really right about this, I mean, if El closes the gate and kills the mind flayer's army-"

"Will's a part of that army," Lucas said aloud.

"She closes the gate, she kills Will," Ross concluded.

"Well," Richie said, standing up from his slumped position. "How do we un-army-fy him?"

They all followed Joyce back to Will's room, after she gave them a look that practically screamed she was forming a plan.

"He likes it cold," Joyce said once they'd gotten to his room, looking towards the open window.

"What?" Hopper asked, raising an eyebrow.

"It's what Will kept saying to me," Joyce told them. "He likes it cold." She shut the window and turned around.

"We keep giving it what it wants," she said.

"If this is a virus," Nancy started," and Will's the host, then..."

"Then we need to make the host uninhabitable," Jonathan said.

"So if he likes it cold," Nancy continued.

"We need to burn it out of him," Joyce finished.

"We have to do it somewhere he doesn't know this time," Mike said.

"That way he can't bring the demodogs back to us," Richie added.

"Some where far away," Dustin suggested.

El was leaving again. Only this time, it was with Hopper, and he was supposed to bring her back. Ross was talking to him about it at that very moment, as she followed him to his truck.

"You *promise* you'll bring her back?" she asked once more, pausing as he stopped at the door to the drivers's side.

"I told you, kid, I promise," he groaned. "What, will a pinky promise make you feel any better?"

She remembered Dr. Owens, and his pinky promise. He was still in that lab. Ross didn't know if he was alive.

"Owens," she said, catching Hopper's full attention. "He's still in the lab."

She watched his eyebrows draw together, as he frowned.

"Find him," she told him," and bring him back, too."

"I will," he agreed. "I promise."

"Pinky?" she held up her pinky, and Hopper gave an exasperated sigh. Nonetheless, he still locked pinkies with her.

"Pinky."

Ross gave a small smile, which quickly diminished when Hopper pulled out a cigarette and lit it. He looked over Ross to El and Mike, calling out," El...Come on, let's go. It's time."

Ross screwed up her face. "You're *really* gonna smoke at a time like this?" she asked. While she had nothing agaisnt smoking, she wasn't exactly sure where smoking fit into the situation.

Hopper rolled his eyes and nudged her shoulder. "Beat it, kid." She retreated back to Mike, and watched with him as El climbed into the cop car. Nancy was getting into Jonathan's car, as well, and they quickly headed off.

Everyone else stood behind them on the porch, watching as they departed.

She heard Richie give a loud sigh.

"What now?

Disclaimer: I don't own the ideas, characters, or plot of Stranger Thing or It.

candy95: Thanks! I'm happy to say that the *real* real action starts next chapter.

LIsa: Thank you sooo much! I hope you liked this one!

JustCrazy: Thanks for the review! And as for your theory, be as bold as you want!;) I love to hear feedback and what you guys think of things!

A/N: Yay another chapter! Sad to say there's only three left, but I *am* currently working on an epilogue I think you'll all enjoy! Among other good news, at my last art show all my pieces got awards! I know that's not related to this in anyway, but I'm superr proud. Wish me luck for tomorrow's and thursday's shows! Sorry for any grammatical/spelling errors, and I hope you like this chapter!

-blockthewriter

13. Chapter 13

Richie watched in pure amusement as Dustin threw item after item out of the fridge. The curly haired boy sighed, and stepped back, turning to look at the senior standing behind him.

"Alright, it should fit now," he told Steve pointing to the empty refrigerator. Richie grinned.

"That's what she said," he said loudly, letting out a laugh. Steve turned to him, looking absolutely done with life.

"Not the time," he shook his head. He glanced down on at the dead demodog in his arms, and then to Dustin. "Is this really necessary?"

"Yes, it is, okay?" Dustin exclaimed, gesturing to the corpse. "This is a ground-breaking scientific discovery. We can't just bury it like some common mammal, okay? It's not a dog."

"Wait," Richie interuppted, holding up a finger. He eyed Dustin, pointing at him. "Aren't you the one calling these things demo- *dogs?*"

"Not the point," Dustin said, rolling his eyes. "Just put it in."

Richie snickered, trying his hardest not to comment. Because that was *also* what she said.

"Alright, alright, alright," Steve mumbled, nodding at Dustin to move out of the way. "But you're explaining this to Mrs. Byers, alright?"

He lugged the animal, monster, *whatever,* into the fridge, trying his hardest to shove it in. He only succeeded in slamming the damn things head into the top of the fridge.

"Chist," he grunted, turning slightly towards them. "Help me out."

"What am I supposed to do?" Dustin asked.

"Get the door, man, get the door."

"Alright," Dustin said, stepping up to hold the door back so it didn't

swing close. "I got the door."

"You," Steve said, looking at Richie. "Not-Mike, shove it's head in there." Richie only crossed his arms, wearing a defiant look.

"Not until you call me by my real name," he said, shrugging simply. Steve glared, struggling a bit more with the demodog. For a moment, Richie thought the guy would settle for no help at all, until he cursed loudly.

"Dammit, Richie!" he hissed. Richie smiled, stepping forward to carefully tuck the demodogs head inside the fridge. He face screwed into disgust.

"That's fucking disgusting," he said, pulling his hands back and wincing as a trail of slime followed.

"Ew. Jesus," Steve said pushing it all the way in.

"God," Dustin muttered, quickly helping Steve shove the door closed. Richie wiped his hands on jeans, giving a low whistle.

"That's nastier then Eddie's mom on Halloween," he said, drawing in Dustin and Steve's attention.

"Who?" Steve asked.

"Old friend," Richie dismissed, moving into the other room. Max was kneeling on the floor, holding a dustpan for Lucas, so he could sweep up the glass. Mike was pacing, which Richie could clearly interpret was annoying Lucas.

The Sinclair boy stopped sweeping, prompting Max to look up at him, and follow his gaze to Mike. "Mike," Lucas started," would you just stop already?"

Mike spun to look at him," You weren't in there, okay, Lucas? That lab is swarming with hundreds of those dogs."

Richie turned as Dustin shouted from the kitchen," Demodogs!" He turned back to Lucas and nodded.

"He's right," he agreed, shrugging.

"The chief will take care of her," Lucas insisted, holding up his hands.

"Like she needs protection," Max muttered from the floor. Richie pointed at her.

"Skater's got a point. We survived without powers just fine," Richie said. "If she's as badass as you guys say she is, she'll be fine."

"Oh, trust me," Ross said, walking into the room," she's more than badass." The girl was now wearing what looked like some of Will's clothes. Jeans that were a bit too short, faded converse, a striped long sleeve shirt, and a jacket over top. Richie was glad. He wasn't sure how much longer he'd be able stand looking at the bloody hospital gown she'd been wearing.

"Listen, dude," Steve spoke up, walking in from the kitchen, a rag in his hands. "A coach calls a play in a game, bottom line, you execute it. Alright?"

"Okay, first of all, this isn't some stupid sports game," Mike snapped back. "And second, we're not even in the game. We're on the bench."

"Right!" Steve exclaimed. "So my point is..." He paused. They all looked on to him, waiting for him to continue.

"Right, yeah, we're on the bench, so, uh, there's nothing we can do." He threw the dish rag over his shoulder.

"That's not entirely true," Dustin said from behind him. "I mean, these demo-dogs, they have a hive mind. When they ran away from the bus, they were called away."

"So if we get their attention," Lucas continued.

"Maybe we can draw them away from the lab," Max added, looking up.

"And clear a path to the gate," Mike said.

"So El and Hopper would be able to get through," Ross nodded.

"And then she could kick this things ass," Richie finished.

"Yeah, and then we all die," Steve exclaimed, crossing his arm. "And stop doing that, all of you."

"Doing what?" Ross asked.

"Finishing eachother's sentences," Steve said.

"That's one point of view," Dustin said, ignoring Steve's last comment.

"No, that's not a point of view, man," Steve argued. "That's a fact."

"Says what proof?" Ross asked.

"Says your dead bodies," Steve remarked. Mike moved from his spot, slipping past Steve.

"I got it," he said, prompting them all to follow him. He went to the hall, and knelt down in front of one of Will's drawings, tapping it. "This is where the chief dug his hole. This is our way to the tunnel." He got up again, and led them to another picture.

"So here, right here," Mike said, stepping onto a big patch of drawings on the floor. "This is like a hub. So you got all the tunnels feeding in here. Maybe if we set this on fire-"

"Oh, yeah?" Steve interuppted. "That's a no."

"The mind flayer would call away his army," Dustin continued, ignoring Steve.

"They'd all come to stop us," Lucas exclaimed.

"Hey!" Steve said.

"We'd circle back to the exit," Ross said.

"Guys!"

"By the time they realize we're gone," Mike said.

"El would be at the gate," Max nodded.

"Hey!"

"Destorying the watcha-ma-call-it," Richie said.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Steve shouted, clapping to get their attention. "This is not happening."

"But-" Mike started, only for Steve to cut him off.

"No, no, no, no, no," the senior rushed, shaking his head. "No buts. I promised I'd keep you shitheads safe, and that's exactly what I plan on doing."

Richie realized that with the towel over his shoulder, and his hands on his hips, he looked stunningly like a mother scolding her kids.

"We're staying here, on the bench," Steve continued, pointing at the ground. "And we're waiting for the starting team to do their job. Does everybody understand that?"

"Calm your shit, soccer mom," Richie remarked.

"This isn't some stupid game," Mike added from the floor.

"I said does everybody understand?" Steve asked again, pulling the rag from his shoulder and jerking it in their direction. Ross huffed, glaring. "I need a yes."

Ross opened her mouth, probably to tell Steve no, Richie presumed, but before a word could leave her mouth, they heard the sound of a revving engine. Max hurried into the living room, jumping onto the couch to look out the window, everyone following close behind.

"It's my brother," she told them, shaking her head. "He can't know I'm here. He'll kill me. He'll kill us." Richie had no idea who Max's brother was, but judging from everyone else's reaction, he was bad news. They heard tires screech to a stop, and Steve handed Dustin his towel, and walked out the door.

Immediately they all rushed to the couch, piling on it to see out the window. They couldn't hear what was said, but could practically feel the tension as Steve stood face to face with Max's brother.

"Wow," Richie breathed out. "He looks like an asshole."

"You have no idea," Max breathed out. Suddenly, Steve whipped his head around as the other teenager pointed to the window. Everyone turned and slumped on the couch, save for Richie and Ross, who continued to watch with bated breath.

"Shit!" Dustin exclaimed. "Did he see us?"

"Fuck," Ross said, pressing closer to Richie to get a better look. "He just pushed Steve." They watched as he leaned over Steve's form, said something, and then firmly kicked him where it hurts.

"Oh shit, he just kicked him in the dick!" Richie shouted, jumping off the couch and pulling Ross from the window. All six of them back into the hall, just as Max's brother slammed the door open.

"Well, well, well," he said, slamming the door behind him. "Lucas Sinclair. What a surprise."

Richie raised his eyebrows, unsure what Lucas had to do with anything. Obviously, he'd done something to piss the man off. He approached them, causing them all to back up.

"I thought I told you to stay away from him, Max," he said, sliding his sister a look.

"Billy, go away," Max said. Richie noticed how her voice had lost all of it's confidence. She took a step back.

"You disobeyed me," Billy muttered. "And you know what happens when you disobey me."

"Billy-"

"I break things."

He snapped into action, grabbing Lucas by the collar of his shirt and practically carrying him across the room to slam him into a wall.

"Billy! Stop!" Max yelled. Ross raced forward as everyone else yelled, only to stop as Billy held a hand out behind him, not even turning to

look at her.

"Maybe since Maxine won't listen to me, you will. Stay away from her," Billy told Lucas. He slammed him agaisnt the wall again. "Stay away from her! You hear me?"

"I said get off of me!" Lucas yelled, kneeing Billy in the balls. The man stumbled back, grunting.

"You're so dead, Sinclair! You're dead!" He shouted, moving to advance.

"Hey, you racist piece of shit!" Ross yelled, prompting Billy's attention. He turned to her, as she held up a wooden rod they'd pulled from the junk pile earlier. "Back the fuck off."

Richie had to admire her courage. He had never been able to encounter his bullies, at least not without his friends by his side. She didn't even back down as Billy took a few threatening steps towards her.

"You're the little shit who dented my car," he said, pointing a finger at her.

"And you're the douche bag who won't leave Max and Lucas alone," Ross bit back, pulling the wooden rod back like a bat. Richie itched to do something, but he just stood there, watching it all go down.

Billy jumped forward, and Ross swung. But he just ducked out of the way, predicting her move, and snatched the rod from her hands. Swiftly, he broke it over his knee, and tossed it at her feet.

"You're dead, too." Before he could take another step forward, however, Steve was there, grabbing his arm and spinning him around.

"No," Steve said. "You are!" And he punched him in the face.

Richie and Dustin laughed as Billy stumbled to the side.

"Steve!" Max exclaimed. Lucas rushed back over to them, and Mike enveloped him in a hug, pulling him behind them. Ross however just

backed up into the table, startled as Billy just stood up again, laughing loudly.

"Looks like you got some fire in your after all, huh?" Billy yelled, grinning from ear to ear. He leaned forward, spreading his hands, nearly hitting Ross in the side of the head. She jumped onto the table and slid back, out of the way of his arms. "I've been waiting to meet this *King Steve* everybody's been telling me so much about."

"Get out," was all Steve said, placing a hand on Billy's chest and pushing him back slowly. Billy licked his lip, and stared for a moment.

Then he swung. Steve ducked, putting his momentum into his next swing, hitting Billy so hard he fell into the table. Ross slid off of it, and retreated back to Richie and the others.

"Yes! Kick his ass, Steve!" Dustin cheered.

"Get him!" Mike yelled, as Steve punched Billy again.

Mike and Dustin, yelled and shouted, telling Billy to eat shit, and telling Steve to kick his ass. Steve punched again, and again, knocking Billy into the kitchen counter.

Billy leaned his head back and let out something between a groan and a laugh. "Kill the son of a bitch!" Dustin yelled.

They didn't notice the plate until it was shattering over Steve's head.

"Shit!" Richie exclaimed.

"Billy!" Max yelled.

"Holy shit," Mike breathed out as Steve stumbed back. Billy advanced on him.

Dustin dropped to the floor as Billy nearly hit him while punching Steve, sending them both bumping into the bookshelf.

"Quit the shit!" Ross shouted, taking a step forward. "Stop!" Steve stumbled into the next room, and Billy shoved a few things off the

shelf, following as well. He grabbed Steve, holding him up.

"*No one* tells me what to do," Billy hissed. Then he head butted Steve so hard, he fell to the ground and rolled a few feet.

They all followed the fight, standing in the next room. Ross looked ready to go in and fight, too, but Richie couldn't tell if she was serious about it, or was just always like that. He grabbed her elbow, for good measure.

"Whoo!" Billy shouted, seeming way too enthusiastic about a fist fight than any normal person. "Get up!"

He decended upon Steve, throwing punch after punch, ignoring their shouts to stop.

Then Max was shoving past Lucas and Richie, towards Billy and Steve. Richie reached out to stop her, but she was too quick. It was with shock, slight panic, and some weird sense of pride, that Richie watched Max come up behind Billy, and all but stab the needle into his neck.

They all gasped, falling silent as Billy grunted, and Max backed up.

Billy stood, swaying on the spot. He looked to Max, then to them, and then back to her. Reaching up, he pulled the needle from his neck, looking down on it, and taking a few steps forward.

"The hell is this?" he asked, taking a step forward for every step Max took back. "You little shit, what did you do?" He swayed on his feet again, before falling backwards to the floor.

"Shit," Mike muttered.

Richie let go of Ross's arm, adjusting his glasses. His mouth was dropped. He couldn't believe what had just happened.

Billy began to laugh, sounding nothing short of a maniac, and Max reached over to grab Steve's nail bat.

What the fuck is she gonna do with that?

She stood above Billy, bat poised to swing.

"From here on out, you leave me and my friends alone," she said in a low voice. "Do you understand?"

"Screw you," was Billy's response.

Max swung down, and Richie flinched as it embedded itself into the floor between his legs. Billy lifted his head to look.

She pulled it up from the floor, raising it again. "Say you understand!" she shouted, and Ross jumped. "Say it. Say it!"

Billy dropped his head, muttering something they couldn't hear.

"I understand," he said again, louder this time. His eyes slid shut.

Max dropped the bat, and walked to his side, pulling a pair of keys from his pocket. She dangled them in the air, turning to them.

"Let's get out of here."

There was no response, only shocked stares. Then Ross grinned, stepping forward.

"That was fucking awesome!" she exclaimed, walking forward. She held up a hand, stepping over Billy's fallen form. Max couldn't help but smirk, and highfive the other redhead.

"You heard the lady," Richie spoke up, stepping forward. He nudged Steve with his foot. "Let's get this fucker in the car and roll out."

Disclaimer: I don't own the characters, ideas, or plot of Stranger Things or IT

candy95: Thanks for the review! Had me scared there for a sec, it said it wasn't a great. However, I'm gonna take a safe guess and assume that was a mistake(hopefully). And I'm glad you liked the interaction between Richie and El! I'd never been quite sure how to introduce the two, especially considering the fact that Richie and Mike look exactly alike. I'm still not entirely sure

about that bit, but it makes me happy to know you liked it. I hope you enjoy this chapter!

JustCrazy: Thanks for the review, and the congrats on my art shows. The most recent ones went great! As for this chapter and the next two, I am very excited for everyone's reactions. But I'm even more excited for the Epilogue. I wrote it completely on a whim, because I was bored and wanted to try something different. I took a huge leap with it, because no one knows exactly how S3 will play out, but I'm hoping that I can make it work, and that everyone will like it. I hope you like this chapter!

LIsa: Luckily for you, the tunnel scene is just the next chapter! I hope you're looking forward to it, and that you enjoy this one!

A/N: Another week, another chapter. This is definetly one of my shorter chapters, but I really like where I left off at. I loved this scene in the episode, it was fantastic. Billy's character really intrigues me. I didn't like him much at first, but he grew on me, and I'm nearly hoping they redeem him like they did Steve. However, I know that Billy's a Grade A racist asshat with daddy issues, but I'd still like to see him over come it, mainly so I can see him use his anger for defending Max or something. I don't know, he's still a little bitch. On another, completely unrelated note: Anyone else see Infinity War? Like...wowo. It was great. Terrible, but great. Anyway, no spoilers here bc Thanos demands my, and your, silence. I'm a Marvel nerd, what can you do. Seriously recommend it, just like I seriously recommend reviewing. It's crazy encouraging to here your guys' thoughts. On that note, sorry for any writing mistakes, and I hope you enjoy!

- blockthewriter

14. Chapter 14

They all loaded up into Billy Hargrove's car, dragging the unconcious babysitter into the backseat. That alone took them about ten minutes(Steve was a tall guy), and then they had to figure out how to fit them *all* in. Mike suggest they leave Steve, to which Dustin strongly protested.

"He's just gonna freak out when he wakes up," Mike argued.

"He won't," Dustin exclaimed. "I swear to god, he won't."

So they kept him in the back, and squished Dustin, Mike, and Richie in there with him. Max would drive, while Lucas and Ross would share the passenger's seat.

Once all in the car, they realized they had no supplies. No goggles, or masks, or lighters, or even gasoline. Mike ran back inside to find as many goggles and masks as he could, managing in bringing back about three pairs of goggles, and two bandannas.

"That won't be enough," Lucas said, holding a pair up to his face.

"Maybe only three of us will be able to go down," Ross said.

"No," Richie protested, remembered the sewers and what splitting up had done to his own friends. "We don't split up. Someone else has gotta have more goggles."

"And even if only three of us can go down," Max began, drumming her fingers on the wheel," what are we going to do without lighters or gasoline?"

"I've got gasoline at my house," Ross spoke up. "My dad uses it for the car and for the firepit. And he smokes, too, so we've got at least one lighter."

"One lighter is all we need," Mike said.

Dustin leaned forward. "How much gasoline?"

"Uh, at least two cans," she said, shrugging a bit.

"That'll work," Dustin said, nodding. "So long as we ration it, we could even go with just one."

"Will your dad let us take it?" Max asked.

"He doesn't have to know."

So Ross's house it was. Lucas and Ross spit out directions as Max drove down the streets, definitely over the speed limit.

Richie payed close attention to their surroundings, memorizing the way to Ross's house from Will's, which wasn't all too difficult. She didn't live far, only a bit farther out, and a bit more secluded.

They drove over a small little bridge, and down a winding pathway, until they reached an old, large Victorian house. Richie's breath left him all at once.

"You live *here?"* Max asked, pulling the car to a stop. "How big is your family?"

"Just me and my dad, now," the King answered swiftly, opening the door from across Lucas and climbing over him to get out. She poked her head back in.

"I'll be back soon."

Fifteen minutes later something dropped out of the window on the side out the house. A bag was tossed out next, followed by Ross leaping to the ground. She reached up and closed the window, then picked up the bag and the can of gasoline.

Richie was wondering why she'd been taking so long, concern about her being in Neibolt crossing his mind. The whole time he's been telling himself, *it isn't Neibolt. It's impossible, Ross can't live in Neibolt.*

And it was true. It was physically impossible for Ross to live in that damned house. For one, Neibolt couldn't be in two places at once. That old house was broken and decayed, physically falling apart. The one before him was in good condition, maybe what Neibolt had

looked like in it's prime. But a lot of Victorian houses looked the same, and Ross would probably already be dead if it was *actually* Neibolt. There was no well, no broken furniture, no dirty floors and nasty animals living inside, no trees with missing posters stuck in it's branches, no leg-less girls, or acidic mattresses, and no demonic clowns. At least he hoped.

So when Ross jumped out the window he was relieved. He noticed the new pair of jeans she had on, she must have changed out of Will's small ones. The bag she'd had over her shoulder was an old pillowcase, which he assumed was filled with goggles and bandannas.

She quickly reached the car, opening the backdoor next to Richie, to hand them the gas and the pillowcase, before closing the door again and rounding the car to her door.

Just as she reached for the handle of the car, the front door to the house burst open.

"ROSLYN RENAE KING, GET YOUR ASS BACK IN THIS HOUSE!"

It was dark out, so all Richie could really see was the silhouette of a man stomping down the steps of the porch. Ross swung the door open and crammed herself inside next to Lucas.

"Go, now," she told Max, looking out to her dad. He finally stepped in front of the headlights, and Richie got a good look at him.

Ross hadn't gotten her redhair from him. His hair was brown, but his seagreen eyes stuck out sharply, the whites of his eyes an irritated red. He was tall, with an average athletic build. Ross had inherited his eyes, and sharp facial features, and the small upturned nose. His nose was crinkled in rage.

"Ross! I told you you were staying home!" he shouted, advancing towards the car quickly. Max kicked it into reverse, backing further into their yard, before switching gears and making a break for the drive way.

Ross's dad chased the car, still shouting for Ross to come back, until she stuck her head out the window and promptly told him that she

was sorry, but he could suck his own dick. He stopped after that, staring after the car until their taillights disappeared.

After Ross's house they made a few more stops. They all decided they'd get more gas just in case, and went to Lucas's and Mike's house to get some. Lucas even had a fancy sprayer they could use,

"Is he awake?" Ross adjusted her position, leaning over the back of the seat. Steve was starting to mumble things, and she wondered if he was finally waking up. Her question was answered when he opened his blackened eyes. He turned sharply to look at the can of gasoline in Mike's hands as the fuel sloshed inside of it. His eyes drifted up to Mike, and his face shifted into confusion.

"Nancy?"

Ross fought hard to not laugh, making eye conact with Richie, who looked to also find it humorous. Up until Steve turned to him and asked," Mike? When'd you get glasses?" Mike and Richie both now wore the most offended looks Ross had probably ever seen.

Steve groaned, lifting one of his hands to his busted nose. Quickly, Dustin grabbed it and pulled it down. "No, don't touch it," he said gently. Steve turned to him and he smiled. "Hey, buddy."

Dustin shushed him, adjusting the ice pack he held to the older boy's head. "It's okay. You put up a good fight," he reassured him. "He kicked your ass, but you put up a good fight. Okay? You're okay."

Lucas pulled on Ross's sleeve, and she sat back down. "We keep straight for half a mile, right?" he asked her, pointing at their map. She regarded it for a second before nodding.

"Yeah, and then you're gonna wanna make a left on Mount Sinai," she told Max, glancing at their driver. The redhead nodded firmly, not taking her eyes off the road, up until Steve asked what was going on. As soon as Max looked back at him, he started to panic.

"Oh, my God," he said, still a bit dazed.

"Relax, she's driven before," Dustin told Steve.

"Yeah, in a parking lot," Mike snapped.

"That counts," Lucas said from the front.

"She's the only one of us that knows how to drive," Richie stepped in. "Unless you'd like to put Big Guy here on the wheel."

"Oh my god," Steve exclaimed.

"They were gonna leave you behind," Dustin told Steve.

"Oh my god!"

"I promised you'd be cool, okay?" Dustin said.

"Not true," Richie butt in. "We just couldn't fit you're daddy-long-legs in the car at first."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa," Steve started, trying to sit up. "What's going on?" Max chose that unfortunate moment to hit the gas.

"Oh my god!" Steve shouted. "No! Whoa! Stop the car. Slow down!"

"I told you he'd freak out!" Mike told Dustin, trying to grab a hold of one of Steve's arms.

"Stop the car!"

"I think he's gonna puke!" Richie exclaimed.

"Push his head out the window!" Ross exclaimed. While she didn't particularly care about him throwing up in the car, she did *not* want to smell it for the rest of the trip.

"Everybody shut up!" Max yelled. "I'm trying to focus!"

"Oh wait!" Lucas exclaimed, pointing out the windshield. "That's Mount Sinai! Make a left!"

"What?"

"Make a left!" Lucas demanded.

Ross yelled as they ran into a mail box, then took a hard left turn. Everyone screamed, and Ross clamped her hands over her ears once Lucas practically screeched into them.

"What the fuck, Lucas!"

Everyone continued to scream and shout until they reached the feild that Richie, Mike, and Ross had been in yesterday. Max hit the brakes right before the big hole. Both Lucas and Ross were launched forward, and hit their heads on the dashboard.

"Hello!" Steve shouted in the back seat.

"Whoa," Dustin said, breathing heavily.

"Incredible," Mike said.

"Insane," Richie added.

"I told you," Max said. "Zoomer." She turned off the car and opened the door. Ross looked at Lucas, rubbing her forehead.

"What's a zoomer?"

He had no answer, and instead reached across her to open the door. She hopped out and followed him to the trunk, where he popped it open. They all started to pull out their gear, bandanas, and googles, and gloves. Steve fell out of the car, before climbing to his feet and leaning agaisnt it.

"Oh no," he groaned. "Guys."

Ross tightened the bandanna around her mouth, and then slipped on a pair of saftey glasses. Mike handed her the rope, and picked up the can of gasoline. They rounded the car, to the front end.

"Hey," Steve snapped as they passed. "Where do you think you're going?"

They knelt down in front of the headlights, and Mike helped Ross tie the rope securely to the front of the car.

"What are you, deaf?" Steve asked them. "Hellooo! We are *not* going down there right now. I made myself clear." They all ignored him.

"Hey, there is *no chance* we are going in that hole, all right?" He finally jumped forward and pulled an object from Dusrin's hands. "This ends right now!"

"Steve!" Dustin yelled. "You're upset, I get it. But the bottom line is, a party member requires assistance, and it is our duty to provide that assistance."

Mike tugged on the rope to make sure it wasn't loose, and then stood up. Ross grabbed the end of it, and they both decended carefully down the side, Max and Richie not far behind.

"We sure about this?" Max asked, peering into the pit.

"We have to be," Mike said.

"That's his way of saying no," Ross shrugged. Mike elbowed her. Then, Steve came down the side of the hole with Dustin, with a scarf around his mouth and goggles over his eyes.

"All right you little shits," he said, his voice muffled from his mask. "Let's get this over with."

Steve was sent down first. Then Dustin, Max, Lucas, and Richie. Mike gestured for Ross to go, but she hesitated.

It finally hit her what she was doing. Going back to the Upside Down.

She looked up to Mike.

"I'm scared," she said honestly. She wasn't sure she could do it. Why would she want to go back? How could she go back?

Mike grabbed her shoulders, and looked into her eyes. "We all are," he told her. "And I know it's hard for you, but I also know you can do it. You can do anything."

"That's cheesy," she said, glancing back at the hole.

Mike's eyes crinkled, and she guessed he was smiling. "But it's true."

"Hey!" the both peered over the edge. Steve was staring up at them. "You two coming or what?"

Ross looked back up at Mike, and he pulled her into, a quick hug. "Come on. I'll be here the whole time."

"Promise?"

"Pinky."

.

Mike helped lower Ross into the hole, and then handed them the gasoline cans. She looked down either end of the tunnel, breathing heavily. Spores floated in the air, and vines crawled up the walls. Richie stepped up next to her.

"You okay?" he asked. She shook her head.

"No," she said honestly. "But I'll handle it. I'll be fine."

"Yeah," she heard Mike say loudly. "I'm pretty sure it's this way."

He was consulting the map they'd drawn up, so they could see where to go.

"You're pretty sure, or you're certain?" Dustin asked.

"I'm 100% sure," Mike said, spinning to face then. "Just follow me and you'll know."

Ross and Richie moved to trail after him as he turned back around, but Steve stuck an arm out. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hey, hey, hey, hey. I don't think so."

He approached Mike. "Any of you little shits die down here, I'm getting the blame. Got it, dipshit?" He grabbed the map.

"From here on out, I'm leading the way," Steve told them all. "Come on, let's go."

He turned and walked off. "Come on."

Ross and Richie waited until everyone was in front of them to start moving. Truth was, Richie wanted to stick next to her. The tunnels reminded him of the sewers, and something about Ross made him feel like he wouldn't end up by himself down there.

"A little hustle!" Steve called out from the front.

They kept going, Steve telling them to hurry up in various ways, until they came to a stop in some open cavern. It was big, and had many tunnel openings.

"Oh my god," Lucas muttered.

"What is this place?" Max asked.

"Guys come on," Steve said, pointing to one of the branching tunnels. "Let's keep moving."

They only got a few feet ahead until a scream broke through the air.

"Shit! Help, help, help! Shit!"

Ross spun around, catching sight of Dustin as he fell down. All her breath left her, and she hurried to his side.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Dustin!" Max exclaimed.

"What happened, what happened?" Steve yelled, shoving past all of them.

"It's in my mouth!" Dustin yelled, shaking his head. "Some got on my mouth! Shit!"

"What do we do?" Richie asked. Dustin started to cough, and Tozier reached down and pounded him on his back. It seemed to work, and Dustin's coughs fizzled out. Finally, he looked up at them.

"I'm okay."

Ross hit him. "You do that shit again and I'll beat the ever living fuck out of your dumb ass."

"Seriously?" Max asked him.

"Very funny, man," Steve snipped, turning back around. "Nice, very nice."

"Jesus, what an idiot," Max told Ross, rolling her eyes. Ross gave her a nod, entirely agreeing.

"Hang on, wait," Dustin said, climbing to his feet. They continued on for another ten minutes before they stopped again.

"All right, Wheeler," Steve said. "I think we found your hub."

He was right. This cavern was even bigger than the last, this time with even more branching tunnels. In the middle there was some sort of table or base sticking out of the ground. It was throbbing. Ross shivered.

"Let's drench it," Mike said.

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candy95: ah yes, classic Mom Steve. I love how they fit Steve into the season, it was fabulous and well-thought. One of my favorite parts of the second season! Can't wait to see how much more motherly he gets in the third. Thanks for the review, I hope you enjoy this chapter!

JustCrazy: Thanks for the review! I'm glad you like how Ross and Richie fit into the storyline. Some part of me thinks it's completely cliche and badly written, but I'm going to take a safe bet and say that's the negativity talking, bc i'd like to think i'm a food writer! I hope you like this chapter!

honeylove90: Thanks so much for the review! I'm glad you like it and I hope you like this one, too!

A/N: ahhhhh, after this only one more chapter than an epilogue! I'll admit, I'm not looking forward to updating, I don't want the story to end just yet, but alas, all good things must come to an end. Hah, just kidding. On another, more depressing topic, I'm not entirely sure when I'll be able to get the prequel to this story out. I've got maybe half of the first chapter done thanks to my procrastination and school, and I don't know if I'll be able to continue, bc my laptops broken. I'm currently updating this from my phone, but i won't be able to write chapters without something to watch the show on. So, if things work the way I want, it'll be fixed here shortly. If not, there's no way i'll be able to get anything done until at least next school year, where we get our chrome books back after the summer. That being said, i will continue to type chapters out on the notes in my phone(it's worth a shot), until the school year ends and my chrome book is taken away. I'd just thought i'd warn you if you don't get the prequel over the summer. Thanks for hopefully understanding! In other news, thanks for reading, sorry for any mistakes, and I hope you enjoy!

-blockthewriter

15. Chapter 15

Drench it they did. Each of them had some form of canister, and they all paraded around the place, pouring and spraying gas in ever place they could reach. Once they ran empty, they abandoned their cans and gathered in the entrance of the tunnel they'd come from.

"You guys ready?" Steve asked them.

"Yeah," Mike and Richie answered.

"Ready," Lucas and Max said.

"You could say so," Ross shrugged.

"Light her up," Dustin said.

Steve flipped open the lighter, then looked towards the hub.

"I am in such deep shit."

He threw the lighter, and the room erupted into flames. The vines screeched and screamed, and Ross's head started to feel like it was going to explode.

"Go, go, go!" Steve yelled at them.

They traced their way back through the tunnels as quick as they could. If they were right about this, all the demodogs would be coming their way, and fast. But for some reason, Ross's body wouldn't let her move fast enough. She quickly lagged to the back of the group, and Mike snatched up her arm, pulling her along. That is, until she tripped.

Ross hit the ground, and Mike nearly fell, too. "Ross!"

"Wait, wait!" Lucas yelled, demanding the other to slow down. "Ross!"

Mike rolled her onto her back and shook her. Her head rolled to the side and she blinked rapidly. Then he noticed the blood seeping through her bandanna. Without thinking, he tore it off. Her nose was

bleeding, and when he tilted her head, she saw her ears were, too.

"Mike," she groaned, shaking her head. It was just like when they were with Will. Her head was pounding, but she fought the will to go unconcious. She had to stay awake.

"Steve!"

The senior was by their side in an instant. "What happened?"

"She fell. I don't think she can keep running," Mike exclaimed.

"Did she hurt her ankle?" Max asked.

"Is she bleeding again?" Richie asked, kneeling down at her feet.

"From her ears, too," Mike said. Ross grabbed his shoulder and tried to pull herself back up.

"We gotta go," she muttered, coughing a bit.

"For fucks sake," Steve cursed. He quickly scooped the girl into his arms. She cried out, but still wrapped her hands around neck. "Let's move!"

They didn't get far again until they had to stop. Steve handed Ross off to Max to suppprt once he heard Mike's shouts for help. "Hold her, don't move!" he demanded, turning back down the tunnels to where Mike was. The other boys were already running to reach him.

"Wait!" Max yelled. Ross could tell she was panicking. When Ross nearly fell over she grabbed one of her arms and wrapped it around her shoulder. "Dammit."

Ross was trying her best to stay up right. She coughed a few times before looking up to the other red head. "We have to help them."

"And do what?" Max snapped. "You're barely awake, there's not much you can-"

Max cut herself off with a scream. She stumbled backwards towards the ground, taking Ross with her. Not even a few feet away was a

demogorgon. Max scooted backwards, and Ross followed suit.

"Shit," Max cursed under her breath. It was just standing there, watching them. *Why?* "Don't move."

Maybe if they didn't make any sudden moves, it wouldn't either. The thought was quickly dismissed when it took a step towards them.

"Steve!" Max yelled. "Lucas!"

Ross turned to look behind her. She couldn't see them. Fear rose in her chest. What if something bad happened to them? She turned back to the thing, looking for anything she could use to distract it.

Suddenly, Max reached over and grabbed her hand. Ross looked up to meet her blue eyes, but then caught sight of something behind her.

Max turned, too. It was Dustin, and the other boys weren't far behind.

"Dart."

Dart? Ross looked back forward. *That demodog was Dart?* She wasn't quite sure how Dustin could tell, but apparently he'd been right. The demodog regarded him carefully, and took a small step back. It had recognized him.

Dustin began to approach it. Immediately, they all protested, but he held up a hand behind him and shushed them.

"Dustin, get back," Max demanded.

"Trust me," he said. "Please."

Ross wasn't sure she could. Did he really think he would get to it? The damn thing ate his cat. The thought was ridiculous.

"Hey, it's me," he said, pulling his bandanna down. "It's me. It's your friend. It's Dustin."

Behind them someone scooped their arms underneath Max's arms and pulled her to her feet. Lucas pulled her back next to the others, and Steve steadily kneeled in front of Ross.

"Get on," he said quietly, gesturing to his back. She wasted no time in doing so and wrapped her arms around his neck. He handed Richie the nail bat, who looked way too enthused to have it. Then he grabbed her thighs to hold her up, and stood. He adjusted her slightly before taking a step back. She tightened her grip, wary of how sweaty her hands were. She hoped she wouldn't slip.

"It's Dustin, all right?" Despite the fact Dart was growling at him, Dustin still knelt in front of him. "You remember me?" Dart took a few steps closer, now.

"Will you let us pass?"

Max and Lucas jumped as the creature opened it's mouth wide and snarled.

"Okay. Okay, I'm sorry," Dustin said calmly, as if it was a normal conversation. "I'm sorry about the storm cellar. That was a pretty douchey thing to do. You hungry? Yeah?"

Dustin reached back into his bag and pulled out a Three Musketeers bars.

Ross internally face palmed. *You're kidding.*

"He's insane," Lucas whispered.

Mike nudged him. "Shut up."

"I've got you're favorite," Dustin said. "See? Nougat." Quickly, he unwrapped the candy bar, and held it out.

"Look at that. Yummy. Here, alright?" He sat it on the ground in front of him. "Eat up, buddy."

Dustin, without looking at them, signalled for them to keep going. Hesitantly, Max stepped passed them. "There's plenty," Dustin told Dart. "I've got more."

Lucas went next, and soon enough they were all in the clear, waiting for Dustin to come with them. The curly-haired boy turned towards Dart one last time. "Goodbye, buddy."

"Why'd he have all those Three Musketeers?" Richie asked quietly from beside them. Steve turned to look at him and shrugged.

"Thank god he did," he whispered. He nodded down the length of the tunnel. "Come on, let's go, let's go!"

As they proceeded ahead, the tunnels began to shake. Dustin and Max fell over, and Steve nearly toppled to the side with Ross. "Jesus!"

Somewhere down the tunnels, a monster screeched.

"What was that?" Max asked, standing back up. They all turned around as it roared again.

"They're coming," Mike said.

"Run!" Richie shouted, spinning back around on his heels. "Run!"

"Let's go, let's go!" Lucas yelled, quickly taking the lead.

"Come on, Mike," Dustin exclaimed. "Move, Mike!"

Ross quickly realized it was harder for Steve to run with her on his back, for he quickly fell to the back of the group. That, or he didn't want anyone to get left behind again. He still managed to keep up with everyone, and soon enough they saw the rope.

"There! There!" Lucas yelled, pointing ahead.

"Come on!" Steve urged. "Let's go!" Much to Ross's surprise he went even faster, surpassing the others to reach the rope first. Quickly, he let Ross's down, and she leaned agaisnt one of the tunnel walls. He turned around, and Max jumped at him. He grabbed her legs and pushed her upwards. Soon enough, she was out, reaching a hand down for the next person.

Lucas went next, so frantic in getting out he didn't even need Steve's help to do it. Dustin grabbed a hold of Ross and brought her closer so she was ready to go. After Lucas was Mike, and then Richie. Just as Steve grabbed Ross to lift her up, a loud roar echoed through the tunnels. "Oh, shit!"

He snatched the nail bat from the ground and pushed himself in front of them. Ross's heart raced, she could see the shadows of the demodogs coming towards them.

It was official. She was going to die.

Above them, Mike, Lucas, and Richie were shouting for them to hurry. But there was no time left.

When the first demodog rounded the corner, Ross's head pulsed, and she nearly fell over. Steve caught her before she could, and then grabbed onto Dustin, pulling them into his arms.

The demodogs raced towards them, and Ross blinked when they ran straight past.

Rather than eating or attacking them, the creatures weaved between their legs, screeching and howling as they did. And soon enough, they were gone.

"Holy fuck," Ross whispered, clutching Steve's shirt tightly. They'd almost died. Tears pricked at her eyes and she shook her head. "Holy shit. Oh my god!"

"Ross?" Dustin asked, turning towards her.

"What the fucking shit!" she yelled. "We almost died! Oh my god!"

"Come on," Steve said, grabbing Ross around her legs. "Grab her!" He hoisted her up, and hands reached down for her, grabbing and pulling until she was well out of the hole. Lucas and Richie pulled her all the way up to the very edge of the pit, where Max was at.

Lucas went back down to get Dustin, and Steve, as Max helped Ross to her feet.

"Are you okay?" she asked carefully.

"No," Ross said, shaking her head. "Never again. Fuck that place. I'm never going back. Holy shit."

"Hey, it's okay," Mike said, his voice surprisingly soft. He grabbed her

shoulders, and smiled. "It's over. It's done. You won't ever have to go back."

"Why are you smiling?" she asked, wiping at her nose, leaning into his hands.

"Because I was right," he said to her. "I told you that you could do anything." Ross furrowed her eyebrows, but couldn't help the tiny smile that grew onto her face.

Then, Richie stepped up beside them. "You look like shit." She punched him.

"Everyone okay?" Steve asked, pulling himself up from the pit. Dustin and Lucas had just gotten out. "No one's dying? Is Ross still bleeding out?"

"No," Ross said, shaking her head. "I mean, I hope not."

"That was intense," Lucas muttered, pulling the goggles from his face. As soon as he said it, the headlights on the car suddenly grew brighter, so bright that they all had to sheild their eyes.

After it had died down, Ross felt her headache fade away. They all stood in silence for few more moments.

"She did it," Mike finally said. "She closed the gate."

One Month Later

"Hey, are you sure you'll be able to find a ride home?"

Ross sighed, pushing the door back open and looking to her dad. "Yes, I promise, Dad." David eyed her steadily for a few seconds, not quite believing her. She supposed he had good reason. The other day she'd gone to the arcade with Max, and lied when she told him she had a ride home. The only reason he'd caught her was because he was driving out of their long drive way when she'd just reached it on her bike.

"Okay. But if you don't-"

"I'll call home," Ross said, rolling her eyes. However, she couldn't help but smile. "I promise."

"Okay," he said, shrugging. "You're good to go then. But remember, no kissing any boys." He laughed as her face grew sour.

"What boy would I even kiss?" she asked.

"Yeah, sure," he said playfully. "Whatever. Just go in there and have fun. Don't party too hard."

"Wouldn't dream of it, Dad."

She shut the door, and her dad waved once more before driving off.

Her dad was doing well. After she drove off with Max and the others that night, her dad had somehow reshaped himself. When she got home, he hugged her, and apologized. To say it wasn't an emotional talk they had would be a lie, but it was something Ross had been thankful for.

While David King still had his bad days and his rough nights, he was around more often. He didn't drink any less, but he had gotten a second job, and he did try to talk to Ross more.

In all honesty, she still couldn't call him a fantastic father. They still fought, they'd even fought that morning. There were still some days where he wouldn't come home, but whenever that happened he tried to make it up to her. He stopped taking her money, for the most part, but he at least paid her back. David King was in no way a great father, but he was a trying father, and that was good enough for Ross at the moment.

"Hey! Dollface!"

She was snapped out of her thoughts as someone came up next to her. Richie Tozier gave her a smile, and waved a hand in front of her face. "You awake there, Ross? Been standing here for the past two minutes."

"You've been watching me for the past two minutes?" Ross shot back, batting his hand away from her.. "God, you creep."

Richie shrugged, as if to say he couldn't help himself, and they both laughed. Then, he looked her up and down and yelped dramatically. "Ah! You're wearing a dress!"

And she regretted it, her legs were cold. It was a pale green, simple sun dress that cinched at the waist. It was the only one she had, and it was the same one she wore last year, but she was not about to invest in a new one for a measly dance. With it she wore her converse, and she had on a black leather jacket over top.

"Yeah, yeah," she said, rolling her eyes. "And I'm freezing. Can we go inside?"

Richie gestured for her to go, saying cheekily in an attemp at a british accent, "Ladies first."

She raised an eyebrow. "Then go. I'm not gonna wait out here all night for you."

He laughed. "Touche."

Together they walked inside, and paid for admission. Mr. Clarke told them they looked good, and to have fun, before they walked into the gym. The whole place was decked out. Blue and white streamers, paper snowflakes hanging from the ceiling, blue colored table sheets and balloons. They quickly found an empty table and sat down.

It looked like Richie had *tried* to look neater for the night, but didn't put very much effort into it. He wore jeans with no holes, and a black button up, with a green bowtie, and that's wear the neatness ended. He still wore his worn out converse, and with his sleeves rolled up she could see most of the multi-colored bandaids he had to cover up his scrapes. He glasses were smudged, and it almost looked like his hair was messier than usual. But Ross liked the look. She couldn't quite imagine the boy wearing something very proper.

None of their other friends had arrived yet, so they sat at the table and talked about last year's dance until Mike and Nancy showed up.

Nancy was running the punch line, so she quickly parted from her brother to report to her station. Not soon after Mike came Will, who's older sibling was also helping out with the dance.

Richie whistled as he approached them. "Wow, Byers," he said. "You sure do know how to clean yourself up!"

Will smiled, winking cheesily at them all before taking a spot at the table. "Right back atcha, Tozier." Richie and Will had developed a surprisingly good friendship, and Will somehow managed to return a lot of his jokes. It was a bit of a shock, but the rest of the party quickly warmed up to that side of him.

"Isn't that the dress you wore last year?" Will asked Ross, reaching over to grab her cup of punch.

She looked down at her outfit, and looked back up to Will. "Whoops," she said flatly.

"Whoa, what?" Richie exclaimed, sitting up. "I finally get to see Rossy in a dress and it's an old one she wore a year ago?"

"Oh shut it," Ross snipped, leaning forward with a smirk. "You aren't that special."

"I feel betrayed," he said dramatically before sobering up. "But seriously, you wore that last year? You were a bean pole last year, I've seen pictures! How do you still fit it?"

Richie was right. Ross *was* a bean pole the previous year, yet still a healthy bean pole. She'd grown over the summer, and gained weight, but Ross could say it was definitely for the better. She now sported a more athletic build, but was still on the smaller side, compared to some girls. She was only 5'1, afterall.

"Oh, she was basically swimming in it last year," Mike spoke up. "Nancy had to safety pin the back so it would fit properly."

"So, you could *techinally* say it's a new dress," Will added.

"Yeah," Ross agreed. "Let's say that. In the meantime, Tozier, don't talk to me about looking nice until you comb that hair of yours."

"No," Mike protested. "Then he'd look even *more* like me."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Richie asked him. "*You* look like *me."*

The party found themselves dealing with this argument a lot. Mike always argued that because they all knew him first, *he* was the one who came first, so Richie looked like him. But Richie would say that because he was born first, Mike looked like him. Truthfully, both boys were a bit bothered by looking so identical. It seemed to get to Mike more than Richie, but there were very few times where they embraced it.

Once, they decided to play a prank on Mike's mom. Richie and Mike switched clothes, Richie combed his hair, and gave Mike his glasses. At dinner that night they pretended to be each other, and no one noticed up until Richie accidently missed his mouth while trying to take a bite of his food, and then ran into a wall trying to put his plate in the sink. Afterwards they all went downstairs and laughed about how blind Richie was.

"Hey, guys." Max had finally arrived, pushing the argument between Richie and Mike to a halt.

"Nice hair," Ross said as she sat down. From the look on her face, Max didn't quite agree. A few minutes later, Lucas showed up, the dance had started. Dustin was late.

"Where is he?" Lucas asked for the umpteenth time, stirring a spoon around in his punch.

"Leave the man alone," Richie said jokingly," he's just getting ready for his date with Mrs. Wheeler."

"Dude," Mike said in exasperation. Richie didn't seem bothered and actually snorted.

"Oh my god." They all looked up as Max pointed towards the crowd. Dustin was walking towards them, sticking his tongue out and spinning in a circle. Ross's eyes widened, and they all stood up.

"Holy shit," Richie and Mike said in unison. "What happened to you?"

They paused to send each other a suspicious look before turning back to their friend.

"What do you mean, 'what happened'?" Dustin asked seriously.

"What?" Mike asked incredulously.

"Dude," Lucas started, a smile growing on his face.

"Your hair," Max finished.

His hair was right. It looked like a bird had tried to build a nest on top of his head. Lucas voiced her thoughts as he stepped up to touch it.

"No," Dustin said, pulling his arms down. "What do you mean what's wrong with my hair? There's no bird nesting in here, asshole."

"Is it a rat, then?" Richie asked.

"No! Okay? I worked hard," he said, touching the curls gently.

"Yeah, looks like your hair did, too," Ross noted. "Stuff looks stiff as a rock."

Dustin opened his mouth to respond, but stopped as a slow song began to play. Ross found it kind of cliche as they all looked out towards the floor, watching as all the dancing kids paired up.

Beside her, Lucas took a deep breath, and turned to face Max. "Max...hey. Um, it's nice, right?"

"Jesus christ," Ross whispered. Lucas could definitely be a charmer, *unless* you happened to be his crush.

"You want to, uh... You wanna like, you know? Like, just you and me?"

"Are you trying to ask me to dance, stalker?" Max asked.

"No," Lucas said. "Of course not. Unless...you want to."

"So smooth," Max chuckled, grabbing his hand. "Come on." She pulled

him into the crowd, and Richie shook his head.

"So awkward," he said. Just as he did, a girl approached them.

"Hey, Zombie Boy," she said, looking towards Will. "Do you wanna dance?"

Will blushed, stuttering over his words until Mike nudged him. He agreed, and followed the girl onto the dance floor.

Beside them, Dustin let out a deep breath. "Wish me luck, guys," he said. "I'm going in."

Then, it was just Mike, Ross, and Richie. They all sat down, watching the crowd in silence. Ross eyed the room, spotting Nancy, Jonathan, and even Steve. She didn't know the senior was helping with the dance. The way he stood there boredly, watching the kids, made her think he was chaperoning.

Suddenly, someone walked through the doors, and Ross nearly blanched. A smile grew on her face and she nudged Mike sharply.

"What?" he asked her. She pointed towards the doors. Quickly, he stood up. She watched as Eleven quickly spotted Mike, and then they moved to meet each other.

"That's cute," Richie said from beside her, watching as they exchanged a few words, and then Mike pulled her onto the dance floor.

"Just like he promised," Ross agreed, nodding.

They fell back into silence for a few more minutes, as Ross tapped her foot impatiently. Finally, she let out huff of air.

"Alright," Ross said, standing from her spot. "Since it's clear you aren't gonna ask me to dance, I'm gonna go ask Steve."

Richie blanched. "Wait-what?" He stood up, turning to face the redhead. "Ask Steve what?"

"To dance," Ross said, raising an eyebrow. "Since you aren't gonna

ask-"

"Well, I didn't know that you wanted to fucking dance," he defended, stepping in front of her as she went to move past. "I mean, isn't slow dancing only for people who like each other and shit?" His face started to grow hot, and he only prayed she couldn't make it out in the dark room.

"What?" Ross asked, screwing her face up in confusion. "No. No! Why would it be like that? I don't like you."

"Well, I don't like you either," Richie exclaimed. "How was I supposed to know we could dance without it being weird?"

"It's not weird if you're best friends," she said dismissively, shrugging her shoulders. Richie, however, paused.

"Best friends?" he asked. "I'm your best friend?"

Ross faltered, rubbing her arm. "I mean, yeah," she nodded. "Next to Will, Lucas, Dustin, and Mike. Why would you not be my best friend?"

Richie pondered on the thought. Honestly, it had never even come to mind. He didn't even consider him ever being Ross's best friend, that spot seemed strongly reserved by Mike. Of course, the idea had crossed his mind of Ross being his best friend, but it was quickly dismissed when he thought of Eddie, and Stan, and Bill.

Wordlessly, Richie grabbed Ross's hand and pulled her onto the floor. They weaved through kids until they found an open spot. From there they could see Mike and Eleven, Nancy and Dustin, and Will and the girl he was dancing with. Richie stood awkwardly for a second, looking Ross up and down. Where did he put his hands?

"Have you ever done this before?" she asked him.

"Does it look like I've ever done this shit?"

Rolling her eyes, she grabbed his wrists and moved them to her waist, then placed her own hands on his shoulders. She moved a bit closer so she could clasp her hands behind his neck. He felt her relax

underneath his fingertips. He tried his best to relax, but for some reason he's mind wouldn't allow it.

One, he was dancing with a girl. Back in Derry, it was clear Richie didn't have much of a chance with anyone, at least not in Middle School. He cussed too much, and made too many inappropriate jokes for the girls' liking. In fact, the only girl to have ever been friends with Richie was Bev, and it was safe to say that at first Bill had been the reason she really went to the Barrens that next day.

Two, said girl just told him they were bestfriends. From going to having one friend that was a girl, to having a best friend that was a girl, was strange. And a bit overwhelming. Richie probably would have never noticed had she not have told him. Was she his best friend?

There were too many things to consider. He wasn't sure anyone could ever replace Eddie, Stan, or Bill. They were too special, and had contributed a lot into who Richie was now. But Ross was an entire different ballgame. As cheesy as it was, she understood him. She didn't mind the cussing, probably because she did it just as much as he did, and the sex jokes didn't get on her nerves until he said one that was particularly too vulgar. She was nice, occasionally, and had a sense of humor herself. She was blunt, yet Richie never took offense to it, for some reason.

"Ya know, when I first moved here, I didn't think I would get any friends," he said quietly, drawing in Ross's attention. Her eyebrows furrowed, and she regarded him curiously.

"Really?" she asked. He nodded, giving a light smile. "Why?"

He shrugged, and she readjusted her arms. "I was a loser back in Derry, with loser friends," he told her. "We actually called ourselves the Losers Club. And we were bullied, too. I don't know, I just guess I thought I'd never find someone like my friends. No one that would understand or like me.

"But then I walked into that room and you were sitting there. And it was weird, because you were staring at me, but after we had an actual conversation you were really cool, and you weren't rude or

lame," he said, looking up to meet her eyes. "You actually talked to me, and didn't act like I was a loser or a waste of time."

"Richie," she said quietly. "You aren't a loser. And you aren't a waste of time. Do you really think that?"

"No," he said, shaking his head. Richie liked to think he wasn't a mopey kid who was depressed and thought he had it worse, and he wasn't one of those kids. But he was a loser, and some people defenitely acted like he was a waste of time. "But other people do, most people do. But not you, and not Mike or Lucas or Dustin or Max or Will or even Eleven. But mostly, mainly, not you.

"You've never once treated me like I'm not worth it, and if you have you've never been serious about it," he finished.

"Well, thank you, and you're welcome, I guess," she said, shrugging her shoulder's lightly.

"My point was, is that I came here thinking I'd never have friends again," he reminded her, "and you proved me wrong. You're my best friend, too, Ross."

She smiled, and Richie was embarrased to say that something fluttered in his stomach. Why, he wasn't very sure, but it happened. The smile was warm, her eyes crinkled, and she even cocked her head a little bit. He noticed her smile was slightly crooked. He liked it.

Richie smiled back.

Then Ross pulled him in for a hug, resting her head into the crook of his neck. He layed his head on her shoulder, too, wrapped his arms tight around her waist, and squeezed. When she didn't let go, he relaxed into her arms, and started to sway to the beat of the music with her.

Ross was his best friend. While no one would ever, or could ever, replace Stan, Eddie, or Bill, Ross had built herself a pedestal right up next to them.

Richie might not have missed Derry very much, nor some of the

memories associated with the old town, but he *did* miss the Losers' Club. And he knew, he somehow *knew* that if they all knew about the friends he'd made, they'd be glad. And that was enough to make him happy.

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candy95: Thanks for the review! In this chapter you get a little insight on him and Will. I wrote that in for a few reasons, and there are different ways I could take it in the future, but it all really depends on the next season. Hopefully it works out as I orignally planned, but there's no telling! Hope you enjoy this chapter!

JustCrazy: thanks for the review! I love hearing you're theories, and thought it'd be okay to let you know that you're nearly on the mark. Not quite, but definetly close! I'm happy to know you're excited for the prequel! Currently got one chapter down! Hope you like this chapter!

LIsa: I hope you enjoy this chapter! Definetly has some of my favorite moments in it.

Grempoots2: Thanks for the review! I'm glad you like it, and i'm also glad to know that the flow hasn't been ruined! A lot of crossovers are a bit choppy, and it's good to know that I was wrong in thinking that this one is! I just loved the idea of the two worlds and groups together, and especially the idea of Mike and Richie basically being identical. I hope you enjoy this chapter!

A/N: The last chapter! But worry not! There will be an epilogue next week, as promised. I'm quite excited for it. A warning, as well, i've only gotten one chapter of the prequel written, and hopefully things will work out and i'll be able to make more. But even if I do, i probably will take a break. It will last roughly up until this story on quotev is finished, as i published this story a few weeks before i put it on quotev. That way, when i publish the prequel the updates will be in sync. So, tell me what you

think! I love this chapter, and i'm excited to hear what you have to say! Sorry for any spelling lr gramatical mistakes, and i'll see you next week!

- blockthewriter

16. Epilogue

When Valery King saw the news at 8:00 a.m., she choked on her coffee with such intensity it even went up her nose. The bitter liquid dribbled from her nostrils and lips, down her chin, and dripped onto her white blouse, staining the fabric. She coughed, trying to clear her airway, and cupped a hand over her nose. But, she ignored the burning pain in her nostrils to stare at the mini TV screen in her kitchen, coffee mug in her other hand.

Annette Phillips was reporting for WIYZ, a channel Valery often watched. The reporters words caught her by the throat, demanding any bit of attention she had.

"*Since the release of the incendiary tape, the once quiet town of Hawkins, Indiana, has spent time in a place it never expected. The national spotlight."*

Valery set her cup down, and wiped her face with her white sleeve. She had several blouses, and even then she could still buy another. Her stained blouse was not important. But the news was.

Hawkins, she thought to herself. *Small Hawkins.* How long had it been since she'd been there? Three years? Two?

But she didn't suppose that last visit really counted, she'd just been passing through. She hadn't even talked to anyone, not even her daughter.

Her daughter. It'd been five years since Roslyn had last seen her. Five years since they last spoke.

But even that wasn't important, not then. Not after Annette Phillips explained *why* Hawkins was on national television.

"*Under mounting pressure, several high-ranking members from the U.S. Department of Energy have admitted involvement in the death and cover-up of Hawkins resident Barbara Holland, who died due to exposure to an experimental chemical asphyxiant which had leaked from the grounds of the local lab.*

"We sent out own April Kline to Hawkins to speak to residents, residents who told us they thought they lived in a safe town. The kind of town where, they say, nothing ever happens."

The screen changed to another woman holding a microphone up to a middle-aged man, who started talking about how the lab had been there ever since he could remember, and was shocked to hear of it's involvement in the death of a teenager. Valery, stunned, reached other and grabbed the remote. She shut the TV off, and began to think.

She hadn't talked to anyone from Hawkins in five years. No one made an attempt to contact her, and she made few attempts to talk to her husband, before he subsequently shut her down. And that had been that. However, despite her detachment from Hawkins, there were a few things she still knew. Or *thought* she knew.

1. The local residents were right. Nothing ever *happened* in Hawkins. At least, not to the public eye.

2. Hawkins Lab had been built when she was in highschool.

3. And Hawkins Lab did *not* experiment with radioactive chemicals.

According to the footage she'd just seen, Hawkins Lab was being forced to shut down. This sent her mind racing, spiralling into new questions with unknown possibilities.

Valery was worried.

So first, she called her dad.

She'd grown up in Hawkins, had lived there for her whole life if you didn't count the past five years. Truth was, she hated the place. The town was truly and utterly boring in her eyes. The only thing she found interesting there in was her father and his work, which had ironically been the reason she'd left.

Her husband liked the quaint town, for some reason, so at the time it'd had worked. David bought her a little house outside of town in the woods, and by a little house she meant a big house. She *loved* Victorian houses. The house had been old, but her and David had

fixed it up well enough. And just in time for their daughter to be born.

But Valery, while she loved David in some way, was not happy. She wasn't satisfied with him, and it seemed like he'd known it. By the time Roslyn was four, the little girl had only been keeping the family together by a thread. David began to show interest in another after years of trying to remind Valery why'd they'd married. It only made Valery more upset.

But the last straw had been her father, what he wanted her to do. She saw the reason in it, and agreed, but David did not. He claimed it would tear the family apart, ruin everything they'd done for Roslyn. Valery argued and argued, tried to get him to see the bigger picture, but he refused.

And Valery loved Roslyn, and Roslyn loved her dad. So she told her father she couldn't do it. The two had a falling out, and Valery had not spoken with him since. And David would have nothing else to do with Valery, so he forced her to tear their family apart in a way he said would be better for Roslyn. Perhaps he'd been right. Maybe it had been for the better.

But Valery couldn't think about that right now, as she dialed the number to her father's home phone, the one she'd memorized years ago.

It rang once, twice, three times, and a few more until the line went dead. No one had picked up.

This could mean multiple things.

1. Her dad had simply moved to a new house.

2. He was busy.

Or 3. Something bad had happened.

So, agaisnt her better judgement, she decided to run with the Winds of Worry and packed a bag. That bag was sat next to her front door, just in case. She called in sick for work and book it towards the nearest library.

She'd spent hours and hours researching for anything she could find on Hawkins, or Hawkins Lab, but found nothing except things she'd already known, or the elaborate lie that was being broadcasted across the nation at that very moment.

With no answers and only more questions, she went home at 9:00 p.m. with one question in particular burning in her mind.

What really happened?

For the second time that day, she picked up the phone to make a call to Hawkins. Except this time, she did not dial for her dad.

One ring, two rings, three-

"*Hello?"*

She recognized the voice on the other end, and it only slammed her with unwanted memories and *more* questions.

"Hi, David," she started, but he quickly cut her off, his tone suddenly much more aware than it had been moments before. Apparently, be recognized her voice, too.

"*Valery? What in the-"* there was a pause, and a scuffle, and then his voice dropped into a whisper. "*What do you want?"*

"Why are you whispering?"

An annoyed huff, and then, "Ross. She's sleeping on the living room couch. Has a friend over."

"Roslyn," Valery perked up. "How is she? Who's her friend?"

"Ross is fine," David retorted sharply. "What do you want? Why are you calling?"

Valery took a deep breath. Obviously, David didn't want any small talk.

"Listen," she started. "It's important."

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LIsa: Thank you, I'm glad you like it! I'm very appreciative of the support you've given to the story!

JustCrazy: I'm screaming, too! This story definetly got a lot more attention and support than I thought it would, and i really wanna thank you for constanty reviewing! And, i also loved that bit with Ross and Richie, it was soo cute. I really hope you enjoy the epilogue! I'm super proud of it and i hope you like it!

crazy95: i'm glad you liked the chapter! As for Ross and Richie, there's definetly a big possibility that they'll end up together, and if they do, it's definetly going to be a slowburn. I want to keep the relationship as realistic as possible for kids their age, which means it's going to take longer than half a year for them to get together, if they do. (i've also never dated someone so i could be wrong). But, yeah. Anyway, I hope you like the epilogue, and i'm extremely thankful for your continued support and reviews!

A/N: guys i'm screaming, I can't. This was my first fanfiction and i honestly didn't expect this much support. Heck, i didn't even think that i was going to finish the story. But, i did, and i'm proud. Anyhow...the epilogue! I'm sure all of you got it, but we finally got to meet Ross's mom! She knows about what's been happening in Hawkins, or at least what the news is saying...I hope you guys liked it! I can only hope that the next season will kind of fit what i need. If not, i'll wing it. Sooo, that's the last installment in this story! At thr moment, it doesn't looke like i'll be getting the prequel out anytime soo, so it might be a while. But i will definetly have it out before next year. If i do get it out before then, and even if i don't, i will(hopefully) update this story with a note saying thr prequel is up..so, keep on notification, and if you don't, i'm sure you'll stumble on the next story at some point anyway. Anway, thanks for all the support, i'm sorry for any errors, and i hope you enjoyed!

- blockthewriter

17. Perused

Hellooooo,

Chapter 1 of *Perused*, the prequel to *Perplexed,* is out! Sorry for the wait! Go check it out!

Reminder that it's set *before* the events of *Perplexed.* This means no Richie and no Max.

I know, I'm sad, too.

Hope you enjoy it!

-blockthewriter

(just realized I accidently put the title on here as Pondered instead of Perused, but it's cool, I fixed it! Go check it out!)